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EIGHT
SERMONS,
ON
CONTENTMENT,
THE
REASONABLENESS
OF
RELIGION,
AND THE
ADVANTAGES
OF
PRAYER.

326

By THOMAS AMORY.

L O N D O N:

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THE PREFACE.

IT is the glory of the Christian Revelation, and proves it to be divine in it's original, that the sincerely good are not only assured thereby of the boundless felicity of a future state, and plainly directed to attain it, but are taught and enabled also to be *contented in every condition*; to pass life in the enjoyment of the most valuable satisfactions, and cheerfully to bear and improve the necessary afflictions of mortality, and even to rise above them.

The full assurance of a particular Providence, and the most express promises of a compleat and everlasting blessedness, to the promoting our interest in which we may make every state of life subservient, are the principal truths, by which the gospel of Christ makes us superior to the world. And to

The P R E F A C E.

assist persons in making the best use of these, for their present and future happiness, is the business of the first Six Sermons. And as the efficacy of these principles for producing *Contentment*, depends on the strength of our faith in the perfections and moral Providence of God, I have endeavoured in the Two following to prove these in an easy and convincing manner.

I am encouraged to present these *Discourses* to the Publick, by the acceptance with which they were heard, and the request of the *Hearers*. To them therefore they are now dedicated; who are desired to accept them as an instance of my hearty concern, that they may pass this life with all desirable satisfaction, as well as arrive at the compleat happiness of a better.

May I be allowed also to express here the great pleasure I take, in this encouragement which they give to a Minister of the Gospel, neglecting party notions and doubtful speculations, to insist upon, and recommend those great and uncontroverted truths, of which the immediate tendency is to make men happy at present, and prepare them for the world of perfect goodness, devotion, and felicity.

S E R M O N



S E R M O N I.

A general view of the nature of christian Contentment, and of the principles on which it is founded.

PHILIP. iv. II.

*For I have learned in whatsoever state I am,
therewith to be content.*

DIVINE art! and happy the Apostle who had learnt it! and well deserving to be herein imitated by all christians, to whom ^a he proposes himself as a pattern; by all who would act worthy of the religion and example of the blessed Jesus, from whom St. Paul learnt it; and who desire that ^b *the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, may continually keep their hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.* The desires of the human heart are so many
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^a Verse 9.

^b Verse 7.

and large, and the present state is so full of uncertainty, disappointment, and afflictions, that it is vain to hope or attempt to be happy, by bringing our external condition and circumstances to be in every respect agreeable to our wishes. Besides, as we are on our trial for life eternal, could we do this, it would not upon the whole be best for us; God has therefore wisely and kindly put it out of our power. The only way then left to make ourselves easy is this, to conform our mind to our condition whatever it be, cheerfully to discharge the duties, enjoy the satisfactions, and bear and improve the afflictions attending it, as all appointed by God infinitely wise and good, and as upon the whole best for us—to *learn, like St. Paul, in whatsoever state we are, to be therewith content.* Nor let us think this an attainment too high for us, since we may be raised to it as he was, by the religion, the example, and the spirit of Christ; and, like the Apostle, *“be able to do all things through Christ who strengtheneth us.”*

The word which we render *content*, *αὐταρκής*, signifies to be *self-sufficient*. This temper, when recommended to us as our duty, must not be understood in a strict sense; for thus understood it belongs only to the almighty and al sufficient God. Nor must we explain this *self-sufficiency*, as supposing an *independence*

* Philip. iv. 13.

dependence on God or on Christ. In the preceding verses the Apostle exhorts the Philippians, in order to secure this peaceful state of mind, to be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, to make known their requests unto God. And when he declares he could do all things, he modestly subjoins, through Christ who strengtheneth me. This self-sufficiency therefore must be meant only as opposed to our external circumstances, and to the conduct of other men towards us; whatsoever our state be, whether we abound or suffer need, be prosperous or afflicted, honoured or reviled.

That christian then is self-sufficient or content in the language of St. Paul, who expects and derives his main happiness from God and from himself, from his own good temper and right conduct. Who firmly believing all the events and circumstances of his life to be appointed or overruled by the supreme wisdom and goodness for answering the best purposes, is only solicitous to do his duty, approve himself to God, and prepare himself for enjoying compleat and never-ending happiness in a state beyond the grave. Who, whatever his circumstances be, chearfully does his duty, is thankful for the blessings of heaven, and bears the trials and afflictions of life with an easy resignation and a calm serenity. Who murmurs not against God, nor

rages at others who may be the instruments of his sufferings, and who desponds not, although his trials may be long and severe; but committing himself unto God in well-doing, pleasingly expects the end of his faith and hope, his full salvation of everlasting happiness in God's heavenly kingdom; and, possessed by this glorious hope, counts ^a *the sufferings of this present time not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed.*

This is a general view of this excellent disposition which we are all to cultivate, and on our learning which depend, in a great degree, our own present satisfaction, the peace of our families, and of all who are conversant with us, the credit of our christian profession, and our final blessedness; since the peace of God prevailing in our hearts here, is one of the best preparatives for our enjoying the perfect peace and everlasting felicity of heaven. To assist you therefore in learning it, I shall distinctly explain and strongly recommend it, representing the principal reasons for it, and motives to determine you to cultivate it; and may God bless what shall be offered to teach us all this important lesson, *in whatsoever state we are, therewith to be content.* The subject concerns us all, whether rich or poor, prosperous or afflicted; and though Contentment may seem hardest to be learnt by persons in affliction, it will yet per-

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^a Rom. viii. 18.

haps be found as difficult to practise by persons in affluence and prosperity, and more uncommon amongst them. The views and wishes of such usually inlarge with their possessions, and their tempers softened by indulgence become less able to bear the least rough accident or cross event. The more their enjoyments are, the more are the ways through which grief and disappointment may enter and torment their bosoms. It may therefore be as necessary to teach those who *abound* to be contented, as those who *suffer need*, and require all their application and resolution to become so.

Let me further premise, that if we would learn this disposition, we must prepare for it, by devoting ourselves, like *St. Paul*, to God and to Christ, by becoming sincerely and prevailingly pious and good. Irregular passions and a conscience of guilt, will necessarily make us uneasy, and unless religion be our governing principle, we cannot have that confidence in God, that regularity in our passions, or those rational hopes of immortal blessedness, which are the chief sources of true Contentment. No habitual sinner can be, or ought to be contented.

That I may assist the sincerely pious in acquiring this disposition, in further prosecuting this subject, I shall

I. Offer

I. Offer an observation or two for preventing mistakes as to the nature of this virtue.

II. Distinctly represent the principles on which it is founded, and the effects it produceth in our tempers.

III. Propound the chief reasons for Contentment, and motives which should determine us to cultivate it; and

IV. Give proper directions, the observance of which may facilitate our improvement in it.

I. I am to premise an observation or two, useful for preventing mistakes, as to the nature of *christian Contentment*. And although the laws and example of Christ oblige us in *whatsoever state we are, therewith to be content, yet*

1. It is not required that we be *absolutely indifferent* as to *health or sickness, pain or pleasure, want or abundance*. On the contrary, the worth and rewardableness of this virtue are founded in the natural disagreeableness of pain, want, and the like, and our feeling them to be disagreeable; yet notwithstanding this, preserving a *cheerful composure* of mind, and an *easy resignation* to the divine Providence. There was indeed a

sect of heathen philosophers, the * *Stoics*, who from a conviction of the greatest superiority in worth of *moral* goodness above *sensible* enjoyments, and of the much greater malignity of *moral* than of *sensible* evils; and from an observation that external prosperity was often possessed by bad men, while poverty, bodily sufferings, and the like, were the lot of the virtuous, were led to maintain this very strange assertion, contrary to the natural apprehensions and common feelings of mankind. "That pain, sickness, want, and reproach were things quite indifferent; and ease, health, abundance, and reputation were no more to be accounted goods than the other evils." But this was talking in an extravagant strain, and which the natural affections of the human mind, and its necessary feelings while it is united to an animal body, will ever prove to be false. Our blessed Lord, who like us ^c *partook of flesh and blood, and was in all things tempted, or tried and afflicted, as we are*, requires no such impossibilities from his disciples, as to be equally pleased with sickness and health, pain and ease, want and a supply. On the contrary, his example allows us to feel, and to express a strong aversion to reproach, torture, and death, provided that we maintain a much stronger aversion to sin and disobedience; and that our submission to God,

love

* See Cicero's Paradoxes.

^c Heb. ii. 14. iv. 15.

love of our duty, and preference of the satisfactions of a good conscience; of hope in God, and bright views of immortal blessedness, be greatly superior to our aversions and fears of external evils. His ^f *soul was exceeding sorrowful* at the near view of his last sufferings; and he prayed earnestly unto God, saying, "*O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me!*" Yet still you see submission to his Father, concern to finish his great work, and the joy set before him, prevailed; for he adds, *nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done!*

We may therefore like health better than sickness, ease than pain, and a competency than want, and yet be contented amidst pain and affliction; if after all, resignation to God, the pleasures of a good conscience, and our heavenly hopes, prevail in our judgments and in our hearts, over the disagreeable sensations arising from our bodies, and from without, prevent all murmuring, and preserve us chearful in our spirits, thankful to God, easy to those about us, and steadfast in the practice of our duty. As a consequence from hence,

2. Christian Contentment does not debar us from imploying any *prudent* and *lawful* means, to free ourselves from want and suffering,

^f Matth. xxvi. 38.

ing, or to procure the conveniencies of life. Our ^s Lord directs us to pray for our daily bread, and to be delivered from evil; and promises, that if we seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, the real blessings of life shall be added unto us. And ^h St. Paul, than whom none more chearfully and contentedly endured losses, wants, and persecutions for the sake of Christ, and whose temper amidst these was *always rejoicing*; yet he pleaded his privilege as a Roman citizen to prevent his being scourged, commended the *Philippians* for supplying him in prison, appealed to *Cæsar* to secure his life from the malice of the *Jews*, and prayed earnestly to be delivered from the *thorn in his flesh*. He commands christians also just before the Text, *in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, to make their requests known unto God*. And as ⁱ St. James directs us when *afflicted, to pray*, St. Paul mentions instances of God's delivering persons from bodily evils, in answer to their prayers. He prescribes, in another place, diligence in our callings, that we may be able to give to them who are in want, and advises *Timothy* to have regard to his health. If we therefore are sick, or in pain, we may, without incurring the charge of discontent, pray earnestly

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^s Matth. vi. 11. — and 33. ^h 2 Cor. vi. 10. Acts xxii. 25. Phil. iv. 14. Acts xxv. 10. 2 Cor. xii. 8. ⁱ James v. 13. Phil. ii. 27. 1 Theff. iv. 11. 1 Tim. v. 23. Eph. iv. 28.

nestly to God for health and ease, and use proper medicine and exercise in order to our recovery. If we are in strait circumstances, we may by humble prayer commend our honest diligence and care to the divine blessing, for procuring the supports and conveniences of life. All that christian Contentment requires of us is this, that our main concern should be to preserve and improve the health of our souls, to secure the riches of conscious goodness, of the divine approbation, and of a good title to never-ending felicity. That our principal satisfactions should be derived from our succeeding herein; and that as to the other pursuit, if God should see it best after all to disappoint us, and fix us in a poor and afflicted condition, we never inwardly find fault with his Providence; but firmly believing, ^k *that all things shall work together for good to them that love God*, we proceed chearfully in the discharge of our duty, and in quest of that state of compleat and everlasting blessedness; weighed against which, all the afflictions and evils of this mortal life, are ^l *light, and but for a moment*.

Having premised these observations, that I might prevent mistakes, I advance,

II. To a more distinct description of this excellent disposition, being *contented in whatsoever*

^k Rom. viii. 28.

^l 2 Cor. iv. 17.

soever state we are. In order to this I would, 1. Represent the truths or principles on the full belief and habitual persuasion of which christian Contentment is founded. And, 2. The effects which those principles will produce in our temper and conduct.

If we would be content amidst pain, affliction, and want, we must over-rule the influence of sense, and silence the clamours of inclination and passion; and, to effect this, must call in the aid of Reason and Faith, and keep present to our minds in all their evidence those principles, which demonstrate the reasonableness of this temper, and, by the divine blessing, will raise us to it. And the principles, the firm persuasion of which will most of any thing contribute to form us to Contentment, are the four following.

1. That all the events of the world, as well prosperous as afflictive, are directed and over-ruled by God, infinitely wise and good, in the best manner, and for the best ends. It was this consideration that calmed the mind of *Job*, and made him resigned and thankful amidst the heaviest afflictions, that ever fell upon mortal man. He regarded the storm which killed his children, not merely as an accidental effect of a blind natural cause; and the murder of his servants, and the plunder of his substance, not as the mere effects of the uncontrouled violence of the *Caldeans* and *Sabeans*, but as events im-

mediately directed or over-ruled by God's all-wise Providence; and he was inabled to express the noblest sentiments of piety and resignation. ^m *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.* We must therefore, like this ancient Saint, firmly believe, ⁿ *that both good and evil proceed out of the mouth of the most High; that it is God who forms the light, and creates darkness; who makes peace, and creates evil. That affliction cometh not forth of the dust; but is either a trial or chastening appointed by the Lord; from whom cometh down also every good gift; whose tender mercies are over all his works. That a sparrow falleth not to the ground without our heavenly Father; all whose paths are mercy and truth to them who fear him, and who keep his covenant; who is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works. And these sentiments are not more pious and scriptural, than they are reasonable.*

It is evident to Reason, that the *matter* of the world, in itself *blind* and *motionless*, if unmoved and unguided by God, could no more continue its beauty and fruitfulness, than it could form itself into such a world at first. As our *bodies* are manifestly the productions of the *divine skill*, and our *spirits* the *offspring of God*, it is clear that our entrance in-

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^m Job i. 21. ⁿ Lam. iii. 38. If. xlv. 7. Job v. 6.
Psal. xxv. 10. cxlv. 17. James i. 17. Matth. x. 29.

to life is under his *immediate direction*; that our *natural genius* and *abilities*, the *circumstances* of our *birth*, the *healthiness* or *sickliness* of our constitution, the *affluence* or *want* amidst which we are born, and all that *necessarily* flows from hence, are the immediate appointment of God. If we reflect also on what we experience, we shall as clearly see, that in the *exercise* of our powers, both of body and mind, we are all constantly *dependent* upon God; without whom we cannot lift a hand, speak a word, or form a design; his all-wise direction and influence being absolutely necessary to preserve the regular action of both. That although we are left so far by God to the *liberty* of our own choice, as to be *moral* and *accountable* agents, yet we must be still under the controul of our supreme governor, and can speak or do nothing, but what he for wise and good reasons permits. Who being, as abundantly appears from the grand and beautiful world he hath framed, and keeps in order, and from the numberless varieties of creatures which he hath made and provided for, infinitely wise and good, can *permit* nothing which it is not upon the whole *best* to permit, and *do* nothing but what it is *best* should be done, worthy the most perfect wisdom, and unbounded and everlasting goodness.

All *discontent* supposes *hurt* and *wrong*; or that things might have been *better* ordered..

dered. But can we ever soberly think, that the God who freely gave us our being, and all we enjoy, is capable of injuring us? Can we ever conceit that things could be better ordered, than they are by all-comprehensive and unerring wisdom and perfect goodness? That a God possessed of these perfections can suffer any thing to be done under his eye which ought not to have been suffered? Or that any power of natural causes, or of wicked agents, can over-bear his omnipotence, and effect what he is not pleased to permit? Must not he therefore be resigned and contented, who steddily believes, that whether his lot be afflictive or prosperous, it is assigned him by the wisest of Beings and the best of Fathers? Are then our patience, submission, meekness, and the like virtues, severely tried by sickness, pain, or by the unkind and injurious conduct of others? The wisdom of God saw it best that we should be thus tried, and we have only to approve ourselves and be happy. Are we punished for our faults by diseases, wants, or disappointments? The medicine, though rough, was necessary for restoring the health of our souls, or the wisdom of God had not prescribed it; and if we conform to his design, and amend, we shall be happy. Must not he, who thoroughly believes, and often considers this great and certain truth of God's uni-

universal Providence be content? Especially if he adds to it the belief of this other.

2. That God makes *all things to work together for good to them that love him.* A full persuasion of the former truth will convince us, that we have, and can have no *reason* to complain; and a like belief and consideration of this will satisfy us, that we can have no *temptation* to be uneasy and discontented. We might be tempted to think, that though what God appointed or directed was *best* for the *whole*, yet some other appointment, or a different situation might have been *better for us.* Whereas we are from hence assured, that if we *love God*, and *keep his commandments*, and use well the understanding and active powers which he hath given us; if we *trust in the Lord*, and do good, we shall *dwell in the land, and verily we shall be fed.* That if we *delight ourselves in the Lord*, he will give us the *desires of our hearts.* That if we *commit our way unto the Lord*, and *trust in him*, he will bring it to pass. That in the comprehensive words of our Lord, *not a hair of our head shall perish, being all numbered by God.* And if we *seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness*, he will add to us every real good. That the *Lord God will be a sun, and a shield; that the Lord will give grace and glory, and withhold no good thing*

° Psal. xxxvii. 3.
lxxxiv. 11.

° Luke xii. 7, 31. xxi. 18. Psal.

thing from them that walk uprightly. ¹ Our conversation therefore should be without covetousness, and we content with such things as we have; for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

These encouraging truths which are so well fitted to produce a constant cheerful contentedness in every condition, are not only thus expressly ascertained to us by divine Revelation; but have also the approbation of our ^{*} *impartial Reason*, seriously reflecting on the unbounded wisdom, goodness, and power of an every-where present God, the moral governor of the world. How can such a Being otherwise than delight in the greatest improvement, perfection, and happiness of his rational creation? And as he certainly directs all causes and events, how can he fail of directing all in a manner most favourable to the improvement and happiness of the pious, benevolent, and upright? Would not his acting otherwise argue a deficiency in wisdom or goodness? Which with no pretence or appearance of Reason can be imputed to an infinite and all-perfect mind.

It is readily granted, that if we, by gross imprudence, idleness, or vice, involve ourselves in evils, God may see it best by these to punish us severely, in order to make us wiser.

¹ Heb. xiii. 5.

* That a particular Providence is consistent with God's governing by fixed general laws, see proved in a Sermon on Psal. xxxi. 15. p. 17, and following.

wiser and better. And in such cases, though it would have been better for us if we had not offended, yet we have no room to be discontented. We are indeed to *blame ourselves*, but to be thankful unto God, if by a *necessary*, though severe discipline, he prevents our final ruin. Whereas if we mean well, and according to our best apprehensions, honestly endeavour to please God, do good to men, and steddily pursue our own true happiness here and hereafter, we have, from the express and repeated declarations in Scripture of God's peculiar Providence over the pious and good, sufficient foundation for being chearful, contented, and thankful in every condition. For we are from hence assured, that nothing out of *our own power* shall be able really to hurt us, that the worst-designed actions of others shall turn out to our good, and that our heavenly Father, who certainly knows what is best for us, will so direct all events, as that they shall issue in our greatest good, and our highest happiness to eternity. The want of knowing and believing this noble truth occasioned one of the greatest philosophers, * *Cicero*, to manifest the utmost discontent, dejection, and even despondency, amidst some great calamities. When raised by this faith, *St. Paul*, amidst much greater distresses, thus triumphs; *If*

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God

* See his *Life* by *Middleton*, 8vo Vol. III. p. 355.

† *Rom.* viii. 18, 31.

God be for us, who can be against us? I reckon that the sufferings of this present time, are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed. I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Would we entirely enter into these sentiments, besides fully believing these truths, we must also thoroughly understand and relish the two following, viz.

3. That the satisfactions of goodness and devotion, of an approving conscience and of hope in God, are by far the most valuable possessions; and contribute more to the happiness of the present life, than any outward circumstances or acquisitions. External good and evil, or the objects without us, which make agreeable or disagreeable impressions upon us, are very much out of our power. Hence arises discontent in their bosoms, who expect their main happiness from these; because they cannot command and dispose of them according to their inclination. On the contrary, the pleasures of virtue and piety, as they arise from within, from our own temper and conduct, are most of any thing in our own power. To be content therefore, *αὐταρκής*, satisfied from ourselves, we must expect and derive our main satisfactions from our own right temper and conduct, from the
conscious-

consciousness of these, and our consequent hopes in the divine benignity. *St. Paul* who had attained this happy disposition, Contentment in every state, informs us these were his most valued satisfactions. Mentioning the troubles he had encountered in *Asia*, by which he was pressed *above measure*, so that he even despaired of life, he adds, '*but our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not by fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world.*

Would we, like *St. Paul*, be chearful and resigned in every condition, we must heartily believe that *our souls are ourselves*, and the improvements and pleasures of the mind our proper excellence and happiness.—That to advance in the knowledge of God and of his works, to have new and noble truths still opening upon our minds, entertaining our understandings, and exalting our affections.—To consider ourselves as the continual charge of God's kind Providence, in order to our being happy here and hereafter; and to act with a steady concern to please him, and enjoy the satisfaction of being approved by him.—To regard ourselves as sent into the world that we might imitate, as well as enjoy the divine goodness; to discharge well the duties of our various relations, and think ourselves more blessed in the good we confer,

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than in that which we receive.—To master our passions; preserve an inward calm, and be superior to the follies and vices of others, by gentleness, meekness, and true greatness of mind; overcoming evil with good, and acquiring the joy of a just self-approbation, and of the deserved esteem and friendship of others.—And finally, to be conscious to continual improvements in knowledge, goodness, resignation, and a grateful piety; and to be thus qualified to look up to God with a better hope of his favour, and forward to immortality with a brighter assurance, that we are hastening to enjoy its compleat felicity.—Would we be always contented we must believe these actions, dispositions and pleasures, which are properly our own, and always in our own power, to be the most valuable enjoyments of life; and applying ourselves accordingly to these, shall find and enjoy true and constant satisfaction. For these being always within our reach, and affliction giving room and opportunity for exerting these dispositions, and enjoying these pleasures, as well as prosperity, we may in every state be satisfied *from ourselves*; when if we looked for satisfaction from without, we should certainly receive disappointment. To confirm this persuasion, and give it all its proper influence,

4. We must preserve in our minds a lively and full conviction, that the present is a state

state of trial for another, an everlasting state; and consequently that nothing here is of any great importance to us, otherwise than as it affects our final, our eternal condition. The belief of this great truth enabled our [†] Apostle to maintain a peaceful serenity under the darkest cloud of afflictions, and to rise above them, and to regard them as *light and but for a moment*, since they wrought out for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. He constantly looked not to the things which are seen, and are temporal, but to the things which are not seen, and are eternal. And as he here teaches this excellent lesson of Contentment by his example, in another place he does it thus by his instructions, "Godliness," says he to Timothy, *with Contentment is great gain; for we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. Having then food and raiment, let us be therewith content.* Nothing besides our pious dispositions and good actions will avail us in the next state, as probationers for eternity; we may therefore be content without riches, and those other things which are of no advantage to us for eternity.

Had we once established these as our governing principles, that our great business in life is to approve ourselves unto God, that he

[†] 2 Cor. iv. 17. [†] 1 Tim. vi. 6, 7.

he may reward us with life eternal. That not our present condition as to sickness or health, want or abundance, reproach or honour, but our temper and behaviour amidst either of these will determine our happiness in the eternal world; and that the joys and sorrows of mortality bear as little proportion for *degree*, to the perfect and divine felicity of heaven, as the few days in which they can continue, bear for *duration* to the numberless ages of eternity. Were these great truths firmly believed, and often and seriously considered, every other concern would appear a trifle in comparison of this, that we approved ourselves to God, whatever our circumstances were. With regard to things external, we ^w *should weep as though we wept not, and rejoice as though we rejoiced not*, knowing that *the fashion of this world passeth away*. We should willingly leave it to God to appoint for us what he sees to be best, whether prosperity, and be careful only for this, (which God always places within our own power) to bear and improve well either of them. We shall, ^x as St. James advises, *count it all joy, when we fall into divers temptations or afflictions*, knowing that the *trial of our faith and patience*, when they are well approved, will be *found to praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus*

^w 1 Cor vii. 30.^x James i. 2, 3.

1 Pet. i. 7.

Jesus Christ. If we are indulged with prosperity, we shall not rejoice in it merely as an opportunity for gratifying our sensual passions, but regard it as a *trust* which we are to improve for the honour of God, and the good of others. We shall *not be high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God who giveth us all things to enjoy. We shall be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up for ourselves a good treasure against the time to come, that we may lay hold on eternal life.*

Can he with reason be discontented, who, whatever he wants, hath always in his hand opportunities for gaining heavenly treasures, for securing or improving his interest in a blessedness, compared to the intrinsic worth of which a thousand worlds are of no value, and to the duration of which a thousand ages bear not the proportion that a moment does to them? From the hope of which he may also derive such joys as will heighten the heaviest afflictions of life, and far exceed the richest pleasures the world can give.

It is not necessary to say more on the general truths, the firm persuasion of which is fitted to produce Contentment. You must be convinced from this brief representation of them, that they are sufficient for the purposes, and accordingly resolve, by proper medi-

meditations, to strengthen your belief of them, and, by a daily consideration, to diffuse their genuine influence over your temper and conduct. What good effects they will then produce, I shall show you in the next Discourse, and thus compleat the description of this excellent temper.



S E R M O N II.

Of the principal Instances and Effects
by which christian Contentment is
manifested.

PHILIP, iv. 11.

*For I have learned in whatsoever state I am,
therewith to be content.*

HAVING in the preceding Dis-
course recommended the follow-
ing truths, as necessary to be
fully believed, and frequently
meditated, if we would be con-
tented in every state of life, viz. That all
the events of the world, as well prosperous
as afflictive, are directed and over-ruled by
an infinitely wise and good God, in the best
manner, and for the best purposes.——That
this God makes *all things to work together
for good to them that love him.*——That the
satisfactions of goodness and devotion, of an
approving conscience, and of hope in God, are
by far the most valuable possessions and plea-
E. sures,

tures.—And that the present life is a state of trial for eternity.—I am now to compleat the description of Contentment, by showing

2. The effects which the firm belief and frequent recollection of these important truths will have on our temper and conduct, with regard to God, to other men, and to ourselves. And Contentment will manifest itself in our disposition towards God by the following good fruits.

1. Gratitude to God, for his many benefits which the contented christian relishes and enjoys in the best manner, is one instance and fruit of this excellent temper. The man satisfied with his lot, and enjoying the good which God designed him, will naturally be grateful to the author of so many benefits; and *"bless the Lord who is the portion of his inheritance, whose favour is the most valuable ingredient in it, and who maintaineth his lot."* While the person dissatisfied with his condition, and who attends only to the evils he suffers, or to the blessings which he wants, secretly repines at Providence, but overlooks and omits to acknowledge the many undeserved favours which God has granted him. Job, the great pattern of Contentment, thus expresseth his, *"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil?"* St.

Paul

¹ Psal. xvi. 5. and xxiii. 1.

² Job i. 21, and ii. 10.

Paul exhorts christians *in every thing to give thanks*, and declares it to be the will of God, and himself practised it; and amidst the sorest afflictions, thus describes his own temper, *always rejoicing in the Lord*. At another time, enumerating his many difficulties and sufferings, he adds in the same place, a grateful account of the consolations and deliverances, which a good God had granted to him; and when as to the world he had comparatively *nothing*, yet he thankfully declares, that in real value he *possess all things*. Suppose then the contented christian to be destitute of wealth, with a warm gratitude he praises God for reason, health, and a pleasing relish of his plain food; for the promised care and supply of his unfailing Providence; for the light and grace and hopes of the Gospel; and especially for the near view of compleat and everlasting blessedness in heaven; of which, the less he enjoys of this world, he anticipates the more by meditation and hope.

Is he deprived of health and ease? He is thankful for the care and tenderness of friends, the relief of medicine, and the conveniencies of life; for the profit he may make of his afflictions, being by them more disengaged from the world, and rendered more seriously intent on making sure the unmixed blessedness of heaven; and for the glorious hope of soon entering on a state of immortal life,

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1 Thess. v. 18.

2 Cor. iv. 8. vi. 7.

and compleat blessedness, where his light afflictions, which are but for a moment, shall work out for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Or is he reproached for the sake of truth, and a sufferer for righteousness? He thanks God that he is ^d counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ, and that great is his reward in heaven. Thus while the murmurer looks only at what is disagreeable, or after what he thinks to be wanting in his condition, frets at Providence and torments himself, the contented person considers with pleasure the many undeserved blessings in his possession, which far exceed what he wants or suffers, praises a good God, and enjoys himself. As a consequence of this,

2. He with cheerfulness acquiesces in all the dispensations of God, even the most afflictive, willingly submitting to whatever is appointed by infinite wisdom and goodness, and expressing his submission in words and actions. Like good old Eli he says, *It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.* Or like a more perfect pattern of resignation, our blessed Lord, *Father, not my will, but thine be done.* He who believes his lot to be assigned him, not only by a most wise and righteous Sovereign, but by a most tender and merciful Father; who by the best ways ever pursues his greatest good, and will make all

Acts v. 41. Matth. v. 12.

xxii. 42.

• 1 Sam. iii. 18. Luke

to work together for good to them that love him, must be well pleased with what he knows is designed for his advantage, and shall certainly produce it.

Is he then corrected for his faults? His language is, *Wherefore should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?* Especially when God punishes him less than he deserves, and chastens us not for his own pleasure, but *for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.* Is poverty his allotment? He thinks the supreme disposer had a right to assign him what station he pleased, that he knew his temper would not so well bear abundance; that by discharging well the duties of a lower station, he may rise high in the favour of God, and in the scale of blessedness for eternity, and he is therefore well pleased with what pleases God. Has he been deprived of valuable relations and friends? He considers, the Lord who gave, hath taken away; that he certainly knew what was best both for him, and for them; that God himself is a Father and Friend who can never be lost, and whose favour will supply the loss of every other friend; and that it can be but a little while ere he shall see all the divine dispensations in the light of heaven to have been most wise and kind, and there enjoy every valuable friend greatly improved, without fearing a separation for ever.

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[Lam. iii. 30. Heb. xii. 10.]

3. The contented Christian goes on in the chearful practice of his duty, studious to approve himself to God, all whose dealings with him he intirely approves. The language of discontent is, *Why should I wait on the Lord any longer?* If God will not indulge those who serve him, with riches, honour, and ease, but will exercise them with poverty and various distresses, let who will mind religion and keeping his commandments, we will not serve God for nought. On the contrary, the contented christian has experienced, that ^h *in keeping his commandments there is a great reward*; and that in serving God he most effectually serves his own true happiness. That gratitude, love, and resignation to God, generous benevolence, and doing or endeavouring to do good to others, moderation in regard to this world, and the rational hopes of a glorious and happy immortality, yield pleasures by many degrees superior to any which worldly prosperity can give. Whether therefore the world smile or frown, whether his endeavours to do good are well or ill received, he continues in the faithful practice of his duty; knows and declares that he serves a good master; is not weary of well doing, nor faints in his mind, but ⁱ *runs with patience the race set before him, looking unto Jesus, who for the*

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^s 2 Kings vi. 33.

Cor. xv. 58.

^b Psal. xix. 11.

ⁱ Heb. xii. 1, 2.

joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame; and thinks all the labours and sufferings of this present time not worthy to be compared with the promised glory; and is stedfastly immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that his labour in the Lord is not in vain.

4. To compleat this character in regard to God, he shows his satisfaction in what God has already done for him, by a placid and steady trust in him for the future. From his heart he says, *all the ways of the Lord hitherto with me have been mercy and truth*; I will therefore ^k call upon him, and trust in him *as long as I live*. He can be no more wanting to me in the future, than he hath been in the past. My make indeed is frail, and my health uncertain, but should he visit me with sickness, he will, as formerly, strengthen me to bear and improve it; and I shall have the same consolations and joys in the consciousness of an increasing health of soul, and of an approved submission to God, and in more frequent and fixed contemplations of the rest and felicity of heaven. I may be deprived of the conveniences of life, but my heavenly Father will not suffer this, unless it may be for my greater good. He hath promised that I shall want for ^l *no good thing*; he hath provided for me hitherto, and I will trust in him for the remainder

^k Psal. xxv. 10.—cxvi. 2.

^l Psal. lxxxiv. 11.

mainder of this short life; who hath provided an incorruptible inheritance, and the fulness of joy in heaven for his grateful and obedient children. ^m I know not indeed what a day may bring forth; but this I know, that all my following days will equally be under the care of the same God, who hath done so well by me all my past days. I will then be ⁿ careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer, and supplication, with thanksgiving, make my requests known unto God. And the peace of God which passeth all understanding, will then keep my mind and heart by Jesus Christ. He who hath promised ^o I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee; I will never suffer thee to be tried above what thou art able; is faithful and mighty to perform it. He will therefore guide me by his counsel till he bring me unto glory. Should I walk through the valley and shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for he is with me. When my flesh and my heart fail, he will be the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. I will therefore wait on the Lord, and be of good courage, for he shall strengthen my heart. I can be placed in no situation wherein I may not approve myself to God, advance my preparation for immortal blessedness, and increase my interest in it; and God hath promised I shall be in that situation wherein I may best effect

^m Prov. xxvii. 1. ⁿ Phil. iv. 6. ^o 1 Cor. x. 13. Psal.
lxxiii. 24. xxiii. 4. xxvii. 14.

effect these. I have then nothing to fear from the world, and nothing to ask of God, but that he would ^p *keep me from falling,* and *present me faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.* Thus the contented christian expresses his satisfaction in his state with regard to God. Let us inquire,

2. How this temper manifests itself with relation to men. And it appears to advantage in the following instances.

1. The person satisfied with his own condition rejoices in the good and prosperity of others; and is far from envying any, whose circumstances are higher or more abundant than his own. Being truly easy in himself, and pleased with what God has allotted him, he is disposed to receive an increase of satisfaction, from the good which Providence bestows upon others, and to ^a *rejoice with them that rejoice.* If they use well health, riches, friends, or any other blessings which the divine wisdom has refused to him, he rejoices that these blessings are so well bestowed, and so well improved. If they are not improved by any, instead of fretting at Providence, and envying the persons who abuse what he has not, he pities them, knowing that this abuse renders them really unhappy now, and will make them extremely so when they are called

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^p Jude 24.

^a Rom. xii. 15.

called to account for the talents they have wasted.

On the contrary, persons dissatisfied with their condition, and uneasy to want blessings of which they see others possess, grudge and envy them the bounties of Providence, and the advantages of this world; and think themselves justified in it, if the persons raised above them in external advantages appear to be their inferiors in moral worth. Hence the caution of the *Psalmist*, *'Fret not thyself because of evil doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity, for they shall soon be cut down like the grass. Trust in the Lord and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land; and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thy heart.* The christian who delights himself in the Lord knows, that God has already given him by far the best blessings of this life, in giving him a heart to know, and love, and trust in God, and seek his happiness in him, and in eternity; and that in his communications of good in the next state, he will soon exceed all the desires of his heart, and make him compleatly blessed for ever. He cannot therefore allow himself to be uneasy, because Providence bestows gifts on others, which are trifles in comparison of what God hath already granted him, and which he verily believes God has withheld

held from him, because they would have obstructed his enjoyment of something infinitely better. He is therefore always disposed to rejoice in the good of others, and to feel an increase of satisfaction from seeing others around him sharing the bounties of God, and pleased with his gifts; and instead of doing any thing to lessen their innocent enjoyment, is ready, according to his ability, to augment it. Which puts me in mind of a 2d instance, wherein christian Contentment expresses itself, in a disposition to do good to all around us, and in a gentleness of spirit even to the injurious. We are by nature formed to delight in each other's happiness, and in promoting it; and the christian is taught by the gospel *to love his neighbour as himself*. The christian therefore who is truly pleased with his state, and persuaded that God has dealt well with him, will wish well to all; will readily concur to remove their sorrows, supply their wants, and promote their peace and welfare; and be never so well pleased with himself, as when he is a witness and a helper of their joy. But when a man is soured with discontent, and fretting at any distresses or pains with which the wisdom of God has seen fit to try him, instead of readily concurring in those friendly offices which may give relief or pleasure to others, he is secretly pleased to see them un-

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easy like himself. For this reason it has been made a rule by those who know the world, that if you would succeed in asking a kindness from any, you should chuse that time for it when they are in the most chearful humour, and best pleased with their condition. The human heart is then naturally most open to the calls of benevolence; and whatever his external condition be, this being the general temper of the contented christian, he will be always disposed to acts of kindness, compassion, and generous goodness.

It further manifests the highest degree of this excellent temper, when we are labouring under losses and afflictions, occasioned by the falsehood, ingratitude, and injustice of others, to preserve a gentleness of spirit towards them, and a concern for their welfare. Yet this we shall be enabled to do, if we firmly believe and often consider, that with whatever ill intensions they may act, yet the Providence of God will never permit them really to hurt us, while we *trust in him and do good*. This persuasion enabled the celebrated *Socrates*, when unjustly condemned to death, to treat his false accusers with gentleness, and manifested a concern for them. "*Anytus and Melitus*, " says he, may get me to be put to death, but " they cannot *hurt* me. My death at this time " is a *favour* of the Gods." And a greater than he, our divine master, considering the wise direction and kind intention of God in all events,

vents, amidst the severest sufferings, not only acquiesced in the appointment of God, saying, *Father thy will be done*, but when expiring on a cross prayed for his murderers, saying, **Father forgive them, for they know not what they do*. Whereas when sinking under losses and afflictions we grow uneasy, and lose the possession of our selves, we shall not behave with any temper to those who occasion us so much evil, but strive to make them as uneasy and wretched, as we through their occasion are become. Our continuing therefore kind to all, and gentle and compassionate to the injurious, is a solid proof that we are still satisfied from ourselves, and with our condition, and intirely resigned to the overruling direction of an alwise and infinitely good God.

3. Contentment, as it influences our behaviour towards others, manifests itself in a steady rejection of all fraudulent, oppressive, or unrighteous methods of procuring the good things which others have, and which we fancy that we want; or of disengaging ourselves from circumstances which we look upon as evil. When the soldiers came to *John Baptist* to know what they must do, he charges them to *"use violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, but to be content with their wages*. Persons content with what they have, can never stoop to practise any
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* Luke xxiii. 34.

" iii. 14.

base or unjust arts for acquiring what they esteem much less valuable than a good conscience, and an untainted integrity.

Whereas they ^w *who will be rich*, who cannot be content unless they have riches, *fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction. For the love of money is the root of all evil. Having therefore, says the Apostle, food and raiment, let us be therewith content.* The person then who is contented amidst poverty, will never lye, nor rob, nor defraud to gain abundance, but will trust to the Providence of God, and an honest industry for food and raiment, and be satisfied with these. The person contented in obscurity, and easy to want the show of life, will never employ any dishonest means to procure the pride of life, but prefer a blameless privacy before a distinction, which, gained in such a way, would only render him more universally despised, and remarkably infamous. The person satisfied with the ornaments of true goodness, and the honour of being approved by God, can see no such temptation in the glare of wealth and equipage, as should once prevail with him to divest himself of the graces of goodness and integrity, which *in the sight of God are of great price*; and had much rather be always unobserved, and unknown by the world, than ill known,

known. Covetousness and ambition, which make people very restless in themselves, make them also by their fraud and injustice, very troublesome to others. Contentment, as it preserves in every state the peace of a man's own mind, preserves also the peace of society, and all its rights and interests secure from deceit or violence. So benign is the influence which this virtue has on our behaviour towards others. Let us now,

3. View this excellent virtue as more immediately affecting a man's self, his own temper, and private conduct, and thus compleat our idea of it. It will evidence itself by the following good fruits.

1. By an habitual serenity and chearfulness, clear of all fullness and melancholy. Whatever his outward condition be, having the Lord for his portion, it is the constant language of his heart, ** I will joy in the Lord, and rejoice in the God of my salvation. The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage; and the Lord hath dealt bountifully with me.* Is he poor, and obliged by constant labour to procure the necessary supports of life? He chearfully goes through the duties of his station, and *† eats his bread with joy, and drinks his water with a merry heart, knowing that the Lord accepts his works; and that whatsoever good thing any man does, the same shall he receive of the Lord,* whether

* Psal. xvi.

† Eccles. ix. 7. Ephes. vi. 8.

whether he be bond or free, rich or poor. That
 * God in many cases hath chosen the poor of
 this world to be rich in faith, and heirs of the
 heavenly kingdom. He does not fully re-
 fuse any of the innocent enjoyments of life,
 because he has not all, but cheerfully makes
 use of the little he has; and supplies the
 scantiness of present enjoyments, by feasting
 himself the more with the pleasures of the
 mind, conversing with God, and with Jesus,
 and looking forward the closer to the pro-
 mised immortality.

Is health denied to him? He will yet re-
 joice if his soul prospers, if the disengage-
 ment of his heart from this world, and his
 vigour in pursuing the perfect blessedness of
 eternity increase. He will enjoy the other
 blessings of life with all the spirit he can,
 though not with all the spirit that health
 would supply to him. Is a valuable relation
 or friend taken from him? He does not a-
 bandon himself to grief, and flight and o-
 verlook all his remaining friends, and all the
 other blessings of life; but firmly believing
 that God designed their advantage in this se-
 paration, he acquiesces in it, thanks God for
 the various comforts he has left him, and en-
 joys them; and, with pleasing hope, looks
 forward to that world where friendships are
 indissoluble, and their joys eternal. Are his
 circumstances in general, as to the world, af-
 flictive?

* James ii. 5.

flictive? He not only continues to do his duty to God and to men, but does it with a pleasure, which manifests his acquiescence in what God has appointed, and a thorough persuasion that he has still continued with him the best blessings; while he continues with him abilities and opportunities for the pleasures of devotion and benevolence, for improving his interest in the divine favour, for enjoying the pleasures of a good conscience, and of heavenly hopes, and laying up treasures in heaven.

The real language of fullness and dejection of mind is this, "God has not dealt well with me, my condition is not ordered for the best;" but this is directly contrary to the faith and temper of a thankful and resigned christian. On the other hand, an habitual cheerfulness is the natural effect of our being intirely satisfied with the allotments of God, and is a perpetual acknowledgment of the wisdom and goodness of all his dispensations, and an habitual gratitude to him.

2. Moderation in our desires and hopes of external good things, and in our endeavours to procure them, is another fruit of christian Contentment. * *Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have; for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. And having food*

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* Heb. xiii. 5. 1 Tim. vi. 8.

and raiment, let us be therewith content. It was a just observation of an antient Philosopher, "That if we live according to nature, "satisfied with what nature requires, we "shall never be poor; if according to fancy "and opinion, we can never be rich." Imagination will ever enlarge and multiply our wants, and make us dissatisfied. Extravagant hopes, eager desires, and chimerical projects of worldly grandeur, wealth and pleasure, are clear arguments that we are not contented with our condition; and that depending so much for our happiness on things without us, which in their nature are uncertain, we never shall be contented.

He who is satisfied from God and from himself, who derives his chief joys from the improvement of his mind, from doing his duty, from the favour of God, and from hope in him, and from the glorious prospect of heaven and everlasting blessedness, has not value enough for sensible and worldly enjoyments to make him greatly delighted with visionary schemes of worldly pomp and pleasure; or to drive him on in the restless pursuit of these, with the neglect of the much more important concerns of his soul and of eternity. He commends his moderate care and honest industry, for procuring the real conveniencies of life, to the divine blessing, and with assurance leaves himself

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in the hands of God. If Providence grants him these, he employs them with a thankful heart for the glory of the giver, and to the good of others; and if it withholds them, he is easy; since ^b he *labours not so much for the meat that perisheth, as for that which endureth to life eternal*, of which nothing can deprive him. While others therefore scarce know any satisfactions, but what arise from sanguine hopes of worldly riches, greatness, and pleasure; or from successful pursuits of these, and are continually tormented by insatiable covetousness, restless ambition, and wantonly craving appetites; his mind is free from all this tumult and disquietude, his warmest desires and largest hopes being engaged by more valuable and certain goods, an all-sufficient God, and an eternal heaven. ^c *He rejoices, in the things of this world, as if he rejoiced not, buys as if he possessed not, and uses the world without abusing it, knowing that the fashion of it passeth away; but that he has a treasure in heaven which faileth not, where is fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore.* In consequence of this,

3. He preserves like moderation in his cares and fears about futurity; and in his aversion to external evils. The Apostle, where he teaches the *Philippians* Content-

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^b John vi. 27.
xvi. 11.

^c 1 Cor. vii. 30. Luke xii. 33. Psal.

ment from his own example, prescribes this rule, ^a *Be careful for nothing ; but in every thing by prayer, and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ.* The man who trusts in God, and whose principal satisfactions spring from hence, from the testimony of a good conscience, and the expectations of a blessed immortality, knows, that while he is in this uncertain state, he can be cast into no circumstances, wherein he may not enjoy these his main happiness. He is assured too, that God will never permit him to fall into any afflictions, but what upon the whole shall prove best for him. He is therefore free from all uneasy fears, and according to our blessed Master's advice, ^c *takes no thought*, is not anxiously solicitous *for the morrow*. He knows that the God, who preserves his life, and formed his body at first, who cloaths the lillies, and feeds the fowls of the air, will much more take care of him. That therefore he has nothing to fear for the future but this, offending his heavenly Father, and forfeiting his paternal care ; which he cannot do, without gross carelessness and inexcusable perverseness, since God has promised, ^f *he shall never be tempted above what he*

^a Phil. iv. 6, 7.
Jude 24.

^c Matth. vi. 25. ^f 1 Cor. x. 13.

he is able, and that he will keep him from falling.

On the other hand, the discontented person having never been sufficient for his own happiness, but having always expected it from things without him, of the vanity and uncertainty of which he has had a thousand experiments in past time, he is consequently full of anxiety for the future. He fears that what has hitherto broken his schemes of happiness will again break them, and even utterly destroy them. That the frailty of his constitution, the inconstancy of his friends, or the injustice of others, may involve him in sickness, want, and disgrace, and force him to despair of being happy here, without his being able to hope any thing better from God, and from eternity. How restless, how wretched, must the cares and fears of this person make him! But how happy the christian, *whose heart is fixed, trusting in God*, and whose concern is engaged by a happiness, which cannot be taken from him, by the satisfactions of virtue and piety in this life, and the everlasting rewards assured to them in heaven!

Let this suffice for the description of this excellent disposition; and let us all be persuaded seriously to try ourselves by it, whether we have learnt this important lesson in whole,

whole, or in part; that we may supply our defects, and strive to be masters of this high attainment. Are we thankful to God in affliction, as well as in prosperity? Do we readily submit, and intirely acquiesce in what he appoints for us, though disagreeable to sense and fancy; or do our foolish hearts fret against the Lord, for denying us what others enjoy, because he saw it not best for us? Do we, notwithstanding afflictions and disappointments from the world, go on chearfully to practise our duty, animated by the hope of pleasing God, and being happy for ever; and thinking ourselves fully blessed if we can succeed herein? Amidst all the uncertainties and evils of life, and our ignorance of what a day may bring forth, do we, with a steddy trust, leave ourselves in the hand of God for all future time? Can we rejoice in the abundance and prosperity of others, though we may be in want and affliction ourselves; or do we secretly envy them? Are we so well pleased with our condition, as to behave easily and obligingly to all about us; or does the disappointment of our fond wishes make us peevish and injurious; and are we put out of all temper with those, who have been the occasions of any loss or evil to us? Are we so much pained to want that which we see some others possessing, that we stick not at using fraud

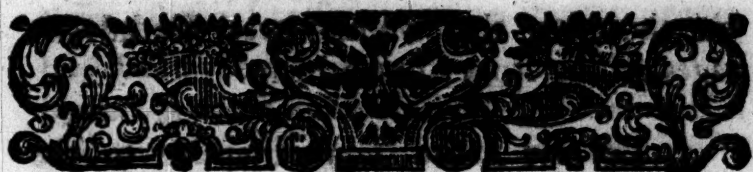
fraud or injustice to gain it; or do we despise the gain of unrighteousness, and that reputation and influence, which need falsehood and base arts to support them? Is our general temper chearful; or do we indulge to a sullen and gloomy disposition? Are our desires and pursuits of worldly good moderate, and do we subject this world to the other, and make it our great concern to lay up treasures in heaven? Are we of an unsettled mind, tossed on the sea of worldly cares and anxious fears for futurity; or is our heart and treasure in heaven, above the reach of time and accident; and do we with pleasure leave the care of our few remaining days to the same kind Providence, which has hitherto been concerned for us?

Perhaps, in some instances we have done well, but not in others. We may not have murmured against God, but we have been peevish and uneasy to men, or too much dejected in ourselves. We may not have been faulty in covetous desires, but we have yielded to anxious fears; or though we would not defraud the prosperous, we may have envied them. Let us endeavour, by a fair comparison of our temper with our rule, to gain a knowledge of our real character, and then set ourselves to mend what has been amiss, and supply what has been deficient, as we would have peace in our own bosoms,
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do honour to the Providence of God, and to the religion of Christ; be esteemed and useful in life, and be qualified to be owned after death as his worthy disciples, by the humble, resigned, gentle, and benevolent Redeemer. To persuade you to this, will be the business of the following Discourse.



SERMON



S E R M O N III.

Reasons for Contentment.

PHILIP. iv. II.

*For I have learned in whatsoever state I am,
therewith to be content.*



AVING explained the nature of christian Contentment, and shown the principles on which it is founded, and the effects which these principles, firmly believed and often considered, will have on our temper and conduct, my method leads me,

III. To represent the chief reasons for Contentment, and the chief motives which should determine us to cultivate it. The former, well considered, will form us to this temper, and improve us in it; the latter will excite us to make those reasons familiar to

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our thoughts, that we may reap the advantages arising from Contentment.

1. Let me desire your attention to the chief reasons for Contentment, which, well considered, will, with the divine blessing, form us to this excellent temper, and improve us in it. And besides the principles mentioned in the beginning, by which this disposition, is, in a great part, formed and cherished in the human heart.—That our condition is appointed by a supremely good and unerringly-wise God, and with a view to our greatest happiness. — That the most valuable satisfactions of life spring out of our own good temper, and right conduct, and not out of any circumstances merely external.—And that we are probationers for eternity, and all the separate interests of this short life are therefore not deserving any great concern of ours, in comparison of our everlasting state; which not our outward condition, but our inward temper and moral conduct will determine. — Besides these great truths, on which we must daily and seriously reflect, if we would preserve an even, resigned, and chearful disposition, let me persuade you frequently to meditate on the following; and may the *God of all patience and consolation* bless them, and render them

Rom. xv. 5.

them effectual to form you to this temper, or improve you in it.

I. One very good reason for Contentment is this, that, be our circumstances, as to the world, ever so distressed, yet the blessings we enjoy, are many more than we have deserved, and the evils we labour under much fewer. That we were made in the image of God, and with capacities for a happiness divine and eternal, and placed here on our trial for everlasting felicity, this is a favour which no one could deserve from his Creator, is itself of infinite value, and when set against it, all the evils of this short life are as nothing. Into what a grand and beautiful world hath the hand of God introduced us; and how many noble pleasures may a rational and pious person, how poor soever, enjoy every day by contemplating the greatness, beauty, variety, and usefulness of the works and creatures of God, and adoring and loving the great Author of all good? And are the pleasures of wealth and luxury, which perhaps we regret, and for the want of them are discontented, pleasures which too generally divert persons from pursuing and enjoying mental satisfactions, are these to be compared with those noble delights, which a good God has placed within the reach of every one? Can any of us say, we have so well improved our reasonable powers, and so piously attended to the discove-

ries of the divine perfections around us as to deserve, that God for our sakes should constantly exert infinite wisdom and power in preserving the beauty and order of the world, and continuing our reason and life?

We are formed for the pleasures of benevolence and friendship, we can wish well to all, do good to many, rejoice in the bounty of God, which overflows the creation, deserve the esteem and friendship of others, and the approbation of our own minds, and know that we are approved of God; from the prevalency of a divine temper in our hearts, these pleasures which in their supream degree are the happiness of God, we may every day, in some degree, possess, and raise the relish of them by the charming prospect of soon enjoying these satisfactions in a much higher degree and for ever. We foolishly neglect these pleasures for the sake of meaner, which God in mercy denies, and our want of which prompts us to discontent; yet a merciful God continues opportunities for these noble pleasures with us, and the hopes of possessing them in perfection and for ever in heaven; and ought not then our hearts to swell with gratitude, instead of pining with discontent? Is this a Father to be complained of, and a God to be reproached by our discontent, as if he was defective in goodness?

That

That we might enjoy in the best manner, while we are continued here, the delights of knowledge, goodness and devotion, God sent his own Son from heaven to be our instructor and example; and that we might, notwithstanding our many sins and imperfections, indulge the glorious hope of compleat and everlasting blessedness, he subjected the Son of his love to death, and raised him again from the dead. Did we deserve this inestimable favour? In giving us his Son, has not God in effect *given us all things* necessary for our enjoying the best satisfactions of this life, and for rising to the eternal happiness of another? And shall we overlook all this goodness, and murmur at the God of love, for denying us a few mean delights and advantages, which he saw would prove prejudicial to our attaining the other?

And to descend to the inferior blessings of life, the want of which usually tempts men to discontent. If you have not abundance, have you not your daily bread; and would not the health and vigour usually residing with poverty, did you join to them a suitable gratitude to God, give a relish and richness to your plain food, which the luxurious and forgetful of God, whom you are inclined to envy, can never know? Or suppose that you have not so much health as some others, yet what a small proportion do your days
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and weeks of sickness and pain bear to your months and years of health and ease? Is not your sickness also lightened by the care and affection of friends, by the reliefs and accommodations proper for such a season, and by the opportunity and ability given you to make the sickness of the body subservient to the health of the soul; and your disrelish for the pleasures of sense a means of your enjoying more the pleasures of heavenly hopes and contemplations? If you have lost one dear relation or friend, or received unkind treatment from another, yet have you not many valuable friends left, and do you not daily receive many kind offices from them?

And if from the mercies of God you turn your view to your sins, and seriously consider your forgetfulness of God, insensibility to his goodness, and disregard to immortality; your negligence of the great duties of life, and of doing good according to your talents and abilities; your frequent intemperate use of the bounties of heaven, the worldliness of your temper and affections, your secret murmurings against God, the coldness of your gratitude to the Redeemer, and how poorly you resemble his virtues and discharge your duty, though he has set before your hope an immortality of blessedness——If you seriously consider these, and your many other sins, by which you have deserved to be deprived of all

all God's mercies, and punished with an everlasting exclusion from heaven; and then think, how few and light your afflictions in comparison with your faults; and that notwithstanding your ill desert, God continues to you so many temporal blessings, and the means and hopes of being compleatly and for ever blessed——Can you after this find it in your hearts to be discontented with what so good a God hath allotted you? Must not your murmurings be exchanged for thanksgivings, and your hearts overflowing with gratitude, say, “*Verily he has punished us less than our iniquities deserve. We are less than the least of all his mercies. And as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his mercy towards them that fear him. And like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth us.*” When you are therefore inclined to discontent, turn your thoughts from your afflictions to your sins, and to the undeserved favours of God, and you will become ashamed of your complaints, contented and thankful.

2. As another reason for Contentment consider, that God designed the present for a state of trial, not of ease and enjoyment; and that it is every way furnished and ordered as a state of trial should be; and this will cure a great deal of discontent. When persons expect that from the present state of things,

10 ^c Ezra ix. 13. Gen xxxli. 10. Psal. ciii. 11.

things, which God never designed it should yield them, it is no wonder that they are disappointed, and being disappointed, repine. It is evident that we are unspeakably indebted to the goodness of God, for having made the present a state of trial for eternity, and put it into our power during this short life to cultivate and approve those virtues, and especially that faith, resignation, and entire devotedness to him, which will naturally prepare us for the divine enjoyments of another state, and which his immense benignity will reward with compleat, unchangeable, and everlasting blessedness. Let us now consider, whether those circumstances for being placed wherein we are apt to be discontented, are not very proper occasions and means for exercising and approving those virtues; and shall any of us say that we would prefer, during a few years, a state of indolence, sensual indulgence, and untroubled prosperity, which should exercise no virtues, and qualify us for no reward in the never-ending state, before that mixed state of things which the divine wisdom sees to be the best school of virtue, and the best state of discipline and preparation for perfect and eternal felicity?

Is it poverty then which tempts you to murmur? But is not this a proper trial of your trust in the Providence of God for a supply, and of your resignation to his wisdom and goodness who appoints your lot?

Of

Of your integrity, whom not pinching want can drive to fraud and injustice; and of your benevolence, who can regard the abundance of others without envy? Are not the inconveniencies and straitness of your condition fitted to teach you to derive your happiness from God, and from yourselves, and from your preparations for immortal blessedness; who have so little to bias you to seek your happiness in the world? And if you cultivate this temper, and exert these virtues, can you think that the present satisfactions hence arising, and the glorious and divine rewards which will crown you in the heavenly world, will leave you any room to wish, that with the loss of these virtues and these rewards, you had past your time here in wealth and indulgence?

Do you mean well and endeavour to do good, and are your intentions misrepresented and defeated, and is your kindness requited with ingratitude? Must you not own this to be a proper trial of the strength of your benevolence, and a proper occasion for exercising and encreasing your trust in the rewarding goodness of God, and your devotedness to his will? And if amidst such treatment you imitate the patient and constant benevolence of the Son of God, are

not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good; and learn to derive your satisfaction

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more from the consciousness of well-doing, and the hopes of immortality; can you think that the higher sense of the divine approbation you will at present enjoy, and your nearer resemblance to the glory and blessedness of your great Master in the state of retribution, will leave you any room to regret that you have stood this trial?

Hath God after indulging you for a time with valuable relations and friends, removed them by death? Is not this a proper trial, whether, like *Job*, you will *blefs the Lord who takes away*, as well as the *Lord who gives*? Is it not a fit occasion for manifesting to the world your firm persuasion of his unerring wisdom and unchanging goodness? Is it not a method well adapted to take you off from seeking your happiness in anything without you, and to determine you to seek it more in God, and a rational assurance of his favour, and in frequent meditations on that blissful state, to which your pious friends are gone before you? And can you allow yourself to be discontented, that God thus tries you as he did *Job*; when if you take the occasion and approve yourselves, you will be crowned with much more valuable marks of his approbation, than *Job* received in this life?

Whenever therefore you are tempted to repine, consider — Has not God an unquestionable right to prove and exercise our sub-

mission

mission and obedience before he rewards them? Is he not infinitely good, if he will recompence the approved virtue and submission of a few days, with compleat and everlasting blessedness; and would any wise person wish to be excused from labours and trials which will produce such a reward? Are not those particuar circumstances at which we are most uneasy, the properest occasions of exercising some virtue or other, and preparing ourselves for a higher reward? Think often thus with yourselves; and instead of giving way to heart-eating discontent, you will, as *St. James* exhorts, *Count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations or trials*; you will chearfully set yourselves to exert the proper virtues, rejoice in having exerted them, and thus encreased the strength of your minds; and you will enjoy more solid satisfactions than an untroubled state could have given you, and prepare yourselves for a larger reward in eternity. For consider,

3. The shortness of this season of labour and affliction in comparison of the everlasting duration of the state of rest and reward, and you will feel it to be so strong a reason for Contentment, as will easily suppress all risings of the contrary temper. Were a state of want and labour and affliction to continue for some thousands of years, though then in

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reality there would be no proportion between it and an eternity of rest and felicity and glory, yet the imagination would be overcome by so long and dark a prospect of labour, and danger, and sorrow, to be passed through before we could arrive at full satisfaction and blessedness, and an intire resignation and contentment would be a much more difficult attainment. But now, when they are but a few years at longest in which we must struggle with difficulties, and feel the want of compleat felicity, we may be very well content, seeing our journey to be so short, and our heavenly country, the abode of perfection and immutable felicity, so near. *Brethren, says St. Paul, who by considerations of this kind had learnt to be content in every condition, the time is short, let therefore they that weep be as though they wept not; and they that rejoice as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy as though they possessed not; for the fashion of this world passeth away.*

The whole of life is but as a day, when compared with the perpetual duration of the rest and bliss of heaven; and who can be discontented, who by a day of labour and resolution may secure a whole life of ease, abundance and joy? Besides, it deserves well to be considered, that the seasons of difficulty and affliction which provoke you to discontent, make but a short part of this day.

day. For instance, suppose your constitution is sickly, yet how small a proportion does the time wherein you are confined by pain and sickness bear to the time wherein you are capable of pursuing the business, and enjoying the delights of life with spirit; and how does it disappear when we would set it against a state of perpetual ease, and immortal health and vigour? A state which we may best prepare ourselves to possess, and secure most abundantly, by bearing and improving well our moments of sickness and pain.

Are you called to struggle with ingratitude, peevishness, ill-humour, and injustice; and prompted to think it hard, that the vices and follies of others should thus interrupt your self-enjoyment? Think, that ere amidst this discipline, you have learnt, in a good degree, the meekness and gentleness of Christ, you shall be called to your reward, and settled in a state where these vices will no more disturb you; and your discontent will cease, and you will with pleasure practise virtues, which shall be so soon and so gloriously recompensed. What brave soldier would refuse to maintain, for a week, a post of hot and rough service, who was assured, that if he behaved well, he should certainly conquer, and be rewarded with riches and preferment for life?

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Are you disturbed that the wicked prosper, while the pious and upright are distressed, reproached, persecuted; or at best go through life without riches or distinction? Think how soon *the wicked shall be cut down as the grass, and wither as the green herb; while they who wait on the Lord shall flourish as the cedars of Lebanon; and he that faithfully doth the will of God, shall abide for ever; and you will pity those whom you before envied, and, instead of repining, bless the God, who will guide you by his counsel, and afterward receive you unto glory.*

4. The example which the Son of God has given us of cheerful submission, intire resignation, and patient, yet active goodness, is another strong reason for our cultivating this temper; and if we frequently consider it, we shall learn Contentment from him, as St. Paul did. Though he was ^b *the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his perfections, so great was his submission to his Father, and his love to mankind, that he readily put off the form of God, and took on him the form of a servant; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Though he was rich, yet, for our sakes, he became poor, that*

^a Psal. xxxvii. 2. lxxiii. 24.

^b Heb. i. 2. Phil. ii. 6.

^c 2 Cor. viii. 9. Luke ii. 7—51.

we, through his poverty, might be made rich. Though he was heir of all things, he was born in a stable, lodged in a manger, bred in the house, and on the provision of a Carpenter, and subject to him.

When he came forth into public life, and deserved the greatest encouragement, by teaching clearly, and proving fully, the most important truths, and working the most beneficial miracles, yet ^{he} ~~he~~ had not wherewith to lay his head; was supported by the bounty of some devout women, and even reduced to work a miracle to pay a small tribute, and to ask of a Samaritan woman the charity of a draught of water. Though he went about doing good, and his constant aim was the temporal welfare, and eternal salvation of men, he, without murmuring, submitted to be reviled and persecuted, by the persons to whom he was offering the most valuable kindnesses, and went on cheerfully in well-doing. Deserving as he was of the love of his heavenly Father, and always doing what pleased him, he yet submitted to be ^a ~~a~~ man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; yea, to be forsaken by him, being left in the hands, and to the malice of his enemies, to be spit on, scourged, crowned with thorns, and expire amidst insults on a cross; yet still said, Fa-

* Luke viii. 3. Matth. viii. 20. John iv. ¹ Isai. liii. 3.
Matth. xxvi. and xxvii. Heb. xii. 1.

ther, thy will be done. For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame; and was even straitened until, through all these hardships and sufferings, he had accomplished his great design, exalting the glory of his Father's goodness in the salvation of mankind.

You that are prone to be discontented, think what you are, and what you deserve, in comparison of the Son of God; and what a trifle you suffer, in comparison of what he suffered; and be ashamed that you could ever think it much, that ^m the servant should be as his Lord; and, like him, through sufferings, but much less heavy and painful than his, rise to heaven and glory. Consider yourselves as his disciples, and ingaged by your profession to follow his steps, and nobly resolve to learn of him, and to be like him; and, instead of murmuring, bless God, that he hath called you to be ⁿ conformed to the humiliation and sufferings of his Son, in assurance of then resembling him in his resurrection and glory. You want perhaps the conveniencies of life, but can you say, that you deserve them better, or should have used them as well as the Son of God; who, when the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests, had not an house of his own, in which to rest himself? Can you

^m Matth. x. 25. ⁱ Pet. ii. 21. ⁿ Rom. viii. 29.

you repine, that God calls you to practise like submission, resignation, stedfast integrity, indifference to the world, delight in God, and in your duty, and like heavenliness of temper with his own Son, when he promises, that ° as nearly as you resemble him in these excellent dispositions, so nearly shall you resemble him in the perfection of your bodies and minds, and in blessedness and glory for ever? Was not the only begotten of the Father too good to be poor, and can you conceit yourselves too high in moral worth to be placed in so low a station?

Or does this excite discontented thoughts within you, that you are called to spend life in endeavours to do good to men, and serve their everlasting interests, amidst obscurity and ill-treatment, and with but small success? Look unto *Jesus*, who, after having taught, in the best manner, the noblest and most useful truths, and recommended them by miracles innumerable, and by a compleat example of all goodness; was not only reproached and ill-treated in life, but, at his death, had the few voices of his friends and followers drowned in the clamours of multitudes, who cried, *Crucify him, Crucify him*, and was even forsaken by his intimate friends. Think how small your

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abilities,

abilities, zeal, and goodness compared with his; wonder not if the ^p world bated you, when it bated him, nor be discouraged, although you cannot do all the good you wish and endeavour. Difficulty, opposition, and ill success may approve, and heighten your devotedness to God, and to Christ, and your love to mankind. Rejoice then that you serve a God, who, having called you to resemble his Son in the noblest part of his character, if you overcome like opposition, will cause you to *sit down with him on his throne, as he overcame, and is set down with his Father on his throne.* The language of discontent for want of a kind reception from the world is, “this world “ is our home, and from it we expect our “ happiness.” But is this the genuine language of the disciples of a crucified Jesus, who was *not of the world*, who came down from heaven to direct our hearts and our feet thither; and who, ^q *if we are risen with him, and seek the things that are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God, will, when he who is our life appears, cause us to appear with him in glory; and to be for ever with him, in the possession of a glory and felicity that can never fade away.*

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^p John xv. 18.

^q Col. iii. 1.

There are other reasons, the consideration of which is well fitted to form and cherish a contented disposition, whatever our outward state be, and these I shall offer to your thoughts in the next Discourse. May a serious meditation on them, and the divine blessing, render those already mentioned of happy and lasting efficacy!





S E R M O N IV.

Reasons for Contentment.

PHILIP. iv. II.

*For I have learned in whatsoever state I am,
therewith to be content.*

IN order to give assistance to christians in learning this divine art, a general view of it has been exhibited; the principles on which it is founded, and the effects which it produces in our tempers, have been distinctly represented; and in the last Discourse we entered on the

III^d General, and offered some reasons, by the consideration of which we might be convinced of the excellence and obligation of this temper, and through the divine blessing formed to high degrees of it. These reasons are, in part, consequences from the principles

principles before proved, and, in part, founded on other truths. We explained and enforced the *four* following.—That however distressed our external circumstances may be, yet the blessings we still enjoy are many more, and greater than we have deserved, and the corrections we suffer fewer and lighter.—That a most wise and good God designed the present for a state of trial, and not of ease and self-indulgence; and has every way furnished and ordered it as a state of trial should be; and that the things at which we are most prone to be discontented, are essential parts of such a state.—That our time of labour and affliction is very short when measured against the everlasting duration of the state of rest and reward—And that the Son of God, who from his original excellence of nature, and his perfect goodness, might have drawn the best pleas for an exemption from afflictions and distresses, yet cheerfully submitted to give us an example of suffering affliction and of patience, and was perfectly resigned and contented under much heavier distresses and sufferings, than any which provoke us to discontent. I would now desire your impartial attention to a

5th Reason for Contentment, *viz.* That a great part of the wants and evils, which tempt the generality to repine and murmur, are owing to ourselves, and might be supplied or remedied by our acting better; and therefore
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instead of complaining of our condition, we should mend ourselves, and all would be well. Are not the pinching want and extreme distress which attend great numbers of our poor, evidently caused by laziness, drunkenness, and extravagance? The slothful and the sottish pine in want and discontent, while the frugal and industrious are furnished with what is convenient, enjoy the good of their labours, and bless a bountiful God. Are any then consuming in penury and discontent, let them become careful and temperate, and commend their honest diligence to the blessing of God, and their evils will in a great measure be removed, and their wants supplied. They will have the pleasures of a good conscience to sweeten and enrich what they have; and from the Providence of God, and the charity of others, be furnished with what they still want, and cannot themselves procure.

Do sickness and pain tempt any to discontent? Think how large a share of these is to be imputed to intemperate indulgence, sloth, and gross imprudence; accustom yourselves to a steady temperance, proper exercise, and a regular diet, and what proceeded from the contrary causes will be removed; you will enjoy a good measure of health and cheerfulness, and be enabled to bear with an easy submission, what is occasioned by the frailty of your make, and what is purely designed by God; and may be turned by yourselves
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for the health of your souls, and made a means of your being more disengaged from the world, and enjoying more abundantly the pleasures of devotion and of heavenly hopes.

Is the unkind, angry, and perverse behaviour of others towards you, that which makes you restless and discontented? Consider how much an irregularity in your own passions, and your faulty behaviour towards them, may have contributed to produce these disagreeable effects. Amend these and you will be likely to mend them. Your continued gentleness and goodness of disposition will overcome their evil. Or should they continue perverse, the consciousness of having so well done your duty towards them, will yield satisfactions, which will in a great measure remove that uneasiness their behaviour now gives you.

Do you repine, because, after all your care and industry, you want the show and luxuries of life? Correct your false notions of things, which make you imagine, that to be necessary to your happiness, which really has little influence upon it. Observe the numbers who are easy and contented without those things for which you pine; seek your happiness more in pleasing God, doing your duty, and establishing your title to the never-ending felicities of heaven, and the torments caused by those unreasonable desires, anxious cares,
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and disappointed hopes will cease; and you will find yourselves much happier than you could have been made, by the fullest possession of the pleasures or the pride of life.

The wants and miseries of mankind are by the splenetic and irreligious magnified into an unsurmountable objection against the goodness of God, and an unremoveable reason for discontent. But were we so just to God, and so wise for ourselves, as to take away from this mountain all those evils, which our own bad temper and ill conduct create, the remainder would appear to be no more than were proper for a state of trial and discipline; no more than we might bear with chearfulness and resignation now, and make subservient to our greater present improvement, and our more exalted felicity for ever.

6. Another very good reason for our being contented, with what is allotted us by the most wise and good Providence of God, is our manifest ignorance, whether that which we are uneasy to want would be really good for us, and that which we complain of be not best; and the assurance which we have from the word of God, that if we sincerely love God and do what he commands us, all shall work for our own good. An heathen Poet * has written an excellent poem to prove, " That many have been undone by
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* Juvenal. Sat. X. L. 347.

terests of eternity ; and was it worth having upon such terms ?

Or are you discontented, that after long exerting a prudent care and an honest industry, you are not rich ? Observe the numbers who behaved well in strait and low circumstances, whom an affluence of the world hath corrupted, and made proud, sensual, intemperate, and of consequence diseased, a burthen to themselves, a plague to others, and universally despised. Might not wealth have had the same ill effects upon you ? And if you are discontented to want it, is not this a plain proof, that you loved it too well, and would have been likely to abuse it ? Should you not then instead of murmuring, bless a wise and good God, who would not indulge you to your ruin ? Think also, that supposing riches might not have proved a snare to you, yet they might to your children. How common is it for young persons, who know themselves to be amply provided for as to fortune, to neglect all moral worth and improvement, and abandon themselves to an idle, useless, and debauched life. Thus, according to the observation of *Solomon*, who had a mortifying instance of it in his son *Rehoboam*^x, *Riches are laid up for persons to their hurt.*

Or is this your ground of complaint, that you are disappointed in a settlement or acquisition, upon which your heart was set ; and
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^x Ecclef. v. 13.

it has been gained by another whom you think less deserving? Consider this desired situation might have many real disadvantages, tho' concealed from you; or that you might have found yourselves after a trial, not so well qualified to improve and enjoy it as you fancied; and that your proper concern is to behave well in the situation wherein you are; and then it will be the care of a wise and good God to place you, where you may best advance the improvement of your minds in true goodness now, and thus become most happy forever.

Were it only that we are ignorant whether what we eagerly desire would upon the whole be good for us, and whether what we complain of be not really beneficial, this must be allowed a sufficient reason against discontent, which might be quarreling with benefits, or impatiently wishing for evils. But when we add to this, that an infallibly wise and unchangeably good God directs all the events of the world, so that *not a sparrow falls to the ground without him*, and even *the hairs of our head are all numbred by him*; who hath promised, that *all things shall work together for good to them that love God*; and that *if we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, he will add the real blessings of life to us*; in this case to indulge to discontent, is absurdly to set up our own confessed ignorance in opposition to unerring knowledge,

and all-comprehensive wisdom. It is ungratefully to refuse what he, whose understanding is infinite, designs for our good ; and to prefer what we do not know but it may turn out the greatest evil to us, before what he knows to be the direct means of effecting our greatest good, and orders with this intention. As therefore, according to the observation of the wise man, with regard to things external, *⁊ No man knoweth what is good for man in this life*, every one ought contentedly to leave himself to the all-wise and all-gracious Providence of God. And none should murmur, because God who certainly knows that of which we are ignorant, will if we be grateful, submissive, and obedient, direct and appoint for us what he sees to be best. This puts me in mind of another reason for Contentment, that

7. The external advantages of which we are in want, are no certain marks of God's peculiar favour; nor are the cross events which make us uneasy, tokens of his displeasure ; we may therefore reasonably be satisfied in a strait and afflicted condition. No man ought to be contented under the displeasure of God ; nor to be easy while he is destitute of the real marks of his favour. And were sensual good and worldly prosperity certain signs of the love of God to us, we ought not to be satisfied without these. But the contrary to this is rather

ther generally the truth. ^a *Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth; but if we are without chastening, he dealeth with us as bastards, not as sons.* And our Lord pronounces it to be ^a *very hard for the rich to enter into the kingdom of Heaven.* And with these declarations of the Apostle and of Christ agree the circumstances of our Lord, and of his Apostles, and of the best men in all ages.

None was ever so dear to God as his Son Christ Jesus, yet scarce any worse accommodated as to the world, or worse treated by those amongst whom he lived. His Apostles *thro' many tribulations entered into the kingdom of God*^b. And *they of whom the world was not worthy, wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, were destitute, afflicted, tormented.* Were forced to take refuge in dens and caves of the earth, and used as not worthy to live upon it. The truth is, ^c *no man knoweth either the love or hatred of God, merely by any thing before him, that is, by his outward condition.* It is from his temper and behaviour in it, that he must learn his interest in the love of God. It belongs to God our Sovereign to appoint us the condition which he sees best; and our great concern is to act well the part which he allots us, whether it be using aright prosperity, or bearing and improving well affliction.

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^a Heb. xii. 6, 7. ^a Luke xviii. 24. ^b Heb. xi. 37.
^c Eccles. ix. 1.

As we are related to eternity, ^a *to fear God and keep his commandments is the whole of man, since God will bring every work into judgment.* This is our great work and highest interest, to fix a character of piety and goodness, and thus to form that temper which will prepare us to be happy in the supream love of God and of Jesus, in the perfect practice of all goodness, and in the society and friendship of angels, residing with them in the court of Heaven. And as from the declarations of our Saviour, from the reason of the thing, and experience of many ages, it is certain, that worldly wealth and ease are too generally hindrances to the cultivating this temper and character, and incline men to seek their happiness in gratifying their senses and animal passions, neglecting all moral improvement, the favour of God, and the blessedness of Heaven. And on the other hand, less abundant circumstances, and a mixture of affliction, soften the mind to religious impressions, and naturally dispose persons to derive their happiness from a good hope of the divine approbation, from the satisfaction of a good conscience, and a clear title to the heavenly felicity; no considerate person can see reason to be discontented, if God hath appointed him that situation, which is evidently most favourable to his everlasting perfection and blessedness.

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^a Eccles. xii. 13.

It is granted, that should the Providence of God reward a moderate application to business, and an honest industry, with wealth and prosperity, we are to rejoice in these as the gifts of Heaven; *to be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up treasures in Heaven*; where we shall receive a reward in dignity and value proportioned to the greatness of our improvements, and the difficulty of managing such *talents* well. But if the wisdom of God appoint us a condition, like that in which he placed his well-beloved Son, it is plain we have no reason upon this account to think ourselves less favoured of God. We should rather rejoice, that by following his steps, and behaving like him, with resignation, humility, benevolence, and integrity, and chearfully pursuing the crown of life and immortality, we may render ourselves also the beloved children of God, *heirs and joint heirs with Jesus Christ, of an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved for us in Heaven*. To add no more

8. Consider the many real inconveniencies which attend those whom you are apt to envy, and those stations of life for not being placed in which you are discontented, and you will see great reason to *be contented with such things as you have*^h. *The sleep of a labouring*

^e 1 Tim. vi. 17.
ⁱ 1 Pet. i. 4.

^f Luke xix. 15.
^h Eccles. v. 12.

^g Rom. viii. 17.

bouring man, said a wise King, is sweet whether he eat little or much, but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep. ⁱ *Give me neither poverty nor riches, prayed the wise and pious Agur, but feed me with food convenient for me; least I be full and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord? Or least I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.* That is, least I commit injustice, and endeavour to cover it by perjury.

The condition even of Kings will appear to have little in it to tempt a wise man to envy them, who considered the weighty and continual cares of government, the violent and unbounded passions excited by royalty, which expose them to sorrows violent as the passions disappointed; the incumbrance of majesty, which renders them for a great part of their time a kind of splendid slaves to ceremony, and prisoners of state; the fewness of their known and real friends, the number of their flatterers, and the greater number of those who envy or hate them; the variety and greatness of their temptations, the largeness of their account, and the few they find who will venture to caution them against the one, or put them in mind of the other. Add to these, their being deprived of the pleasures of a mind calm and undistracted, ever disposed to relish natural and reasonable delights,
and

ⁱ Prov. xxx. 8.

and to enjoy the satisfactions of friendships sincere and approved.

* *When riches increase they are increased that eat them, and what good is it to the owner saving the beholding it with his eyes?* The larger the fortune of any, the greater the attention and solicitude necessary to preserve and manage it well, the more their wants real or imaginary, and the more the dependencies and expectations of others from them. If you observe the world with judgment, you will generally find more health, cheerfulness, self-enjoyment, and a higher relish of natural and rational pleasures, among persons of moderate fortunes, than among the rich and great; and more complaints, weariness of themselves, and satiety of life, where upon the first view you would expect nothing but continual gayety, and pleasures ever new and satisfying. For in short, true satisfaction depends more upon the temper of our minds, than the colour of our state, and the affluence of our fortunes. He who doth not govern his desires, and who cannot be contented with a little, will not find Contentment in a great deal; but will feel his wants and his desires enlarging as fast, or faster than his possessions. Do not therefore suffer yourselves to be imposed upon by the glare of a person's outward condition. Happiness is not a showy thing, nor does it reside without a man, but within

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* Eccles. v. 11.

82 *Reasons and Motives for &c.*

his own bosom. Consider the real advantages of your own situation, and improve these; and observe narrowly the uneasinesses and complaints of those, whom you are often tempted to envy, and it will mightily dispose you to become contented and thankful.

Other reasons for Contentment might be mentioned, but these, if well considered and digested, will be found sufficient, with the divine blessing, to form and establish this temper. Let us therefore earnestly beg the God of peace to bless us in our endeavours, by frequently recollecting these reasons to cherish in our bosoms a disposition, which not only does the highest honour to the most wise and good Providence of God, but has the most immediate and favourable influence on our happiness here and hereafter. This will abundantly appear, when we have considered the motives to cultivate it, which will be represented in the next Discourse.

M
SERMON



S E R M O N V.

Motives to Contentment.

PHILIP. iv. II.

*For I have learned in whatsoever state I am,
therewith to be content.*

AVING in the preceding Discourses given you a general view of this amiable and happy disposition, shown the principles on which it is founded, and the chief instances in which it manifests itself; and mentioned various reasons, the habitual consideration of which is of great efficacy to produce it, our method leads us to execute what was proposed as the second part of the

III^d. General, viz. to propound to your thoughts such motives, as should determine us by a daily and attentive consideration of the

reasons for Contentment, to make it our prevailing disposition. Omitting various other motives, let me desire you seriously to weigh the following, drawn from the excellent nature and happy fruits of Contentment, and the evil nature and mischievous effects of discontent.

I. The excellent nature and happy effects of Contentment should strongly recommend it to us, and determine us with daily care and attention to cultivate it.

I. The moral excellence of this disposition should engage us to cherish it. It is one of the noblest attainments in the christian temper, and therefore worthy of all our care to learn it. This acquiescence in all that God appoints, manifests the most honourable apprehensions, and firm belief of the boundless wisdom, power, and goodness of a governing God. It is heartily to approve, in opposition to all the clamours of sense, appetite and passion, whatever God approves; and from a superior regard to him to receive what is most disagreeable to these, as yet best. It is an habitual and practical acknowledgment of the wisdom, equity, and kindness of all God's dispensations, even where to sense, fancy, and perhaps to our short-sighted reason, they may appear unaccountable. It is like the angels to derive our happiness, not from the gratifications of sense, or the pleasures of imagination, but from love, hope, and submission

tion to God, and a rational assurance of his favour; from the satisfactions of doing good, from the improvement of our minds in every amiable quality, and our preparation for the friendships, employments, and pleasures of Heaven. And when like *St. Paul* we have made a great proficiencie in it, it is *doing the will of God on earth, as it is done in Heaven.*

To serve God chearfully and faithfully no longer, than while he indulges us in the pleasures and grandeur of life, was in the judgement of *Satan* with relation to *Job*, a kind of mercenary religion. But even this grand accuser can find nothing to censure in our piety, when like our blessed Lord, we persevere zealously to do the will of God, amidst want, ill treatment and sufferings, and under the heaviest afflictions with our hearts say, *Father thy will be done.* Let us therefore diligently cultivate this excellent disposition, and endeavour every day to learn more of it. For tho' we shall never learn it in perfection while here, yet we may become continual proficient in it, and thus every day grow more like to our blessed Master, more dear to God, more happy in ourselves, and more meet for the blessedness of Heaven. For

2. This temper commends us peculiarly to the divine approbation, and to the favourable conduct of his Providence, and supplies of his

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¹ Job i. 9.

his bounty. God delights in every disposition according to its moral excellence; and from the last head you may learn, how great his delight in this most excellent one. ^m The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit is, says St. Peter, in the sight of God of great price. And the approbation of the alwise, almighty, and supremely good governor of the universe, is not a barren and ineffective approbation, but includes in it every real good. God will ⁿ make all things to work together for good to them who love him; who preserve, even amidst afflictions, a superior affection to him, and on that account love and welcome whatever he shall appoint. ^o Delight thyself in the Lord, says the Psalmist, with a particular regard to the pious person's situation, amidst adversity of his own, and in sight of prosperous wickedness, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him and he shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day. When we have corrected the exorbitancies of our desires, and brought ourselves to chuse what God wills, he will then give us the desires of our hearts, that which upon the whole it is best for us to receive.

Observe the Contentment and modest resignation of Jacob, when God appeared to him, in

^m 1 Pet. iii. 4.

ⁿ Rom. viii. 28.

^o Psal. xxxvii. 4.

in his way to *Padan-aram*. ^p If God will be with me, and keep me in the way that I go; and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God. And with what peculiar protection and favour, what riches and prosperity, did God reward him. With this temper we are best qualified to make a good use of abundance; and God will grant it, if upon the whole it be best for us, and consistent with our greatest improvement in virtue and piety, and with our highest happiness in Heaven. Or should our heavenly Father, for the heightening our faith, and piety, and resignation, continue us in less abundant circumstances, in which we behave so well; he will then grant us such a clear assurance of his favour, and we shall have so many sensible proofs of his kind interposition for our supply, and our real welfare, as will give us much more exalted satisfactions, than the most abundant circumstances without this sense of the love of God can yield; and ^q *having nothing we shall in effect possess all things*. Of this we shall be clearly convinced, if further we consider

3. The good fruits naturally growing out of this excellent disposition, and the beneficial effects which it is fitted to produce.

^r *Godliness with Contentment, says St. Paul, is great gain*. And thus it will be found

^p Gen. xxviii. 20. ^q 2 Cor. vi. 10. ^r 1 Tim. vi. 6.

by every man who shall make the experiment.

For our exercise of this temper yields immediately noble satisfactions. It is composed of gratitude, love, resignation to God, and steady trust in him; of gentleness and goodness towards others, and a continual regard to immortality, and lively hopes of the blessedness commensurate with it. All these acts of the mind being conversant about the greatest and best objects, naturally give the richest pleasures while they are exerted; they augment also the strength and perfection of the mind, give a most pleasing satisfaction when we reflect that so good a temper prevails, and makes us accepted of God; and they qualify us with increasing joy to look forward to immortality, as by doing and suffering the will of God here we are prepared and intitled to possess it.

The pleasures which arise merely from prosperity generally corrupt and weaken the human mind; at best add nothing to its moral improvement, afford us no reason to conclude ourselves approved by God, and no way prepare us for the heavenly blessedness. Whereas the christian who in every state derives his satisfactions from God and from himself, hath not only joys of his own, which are independent of the world, but by every satisfaction he feels, increases the strength of his mind, and enlarges its capacity for the most valuable

able delights; renders himself dearer to God, more approved of himself, and more meet for the proper happiness of a reasonable and immortal Being in the world of perfection.

Again; Contentment of mind improves the enjoyment of the various external good things in our possession, and lightens the pressure of every sensible evil. Gratitude to God, and an intire acquiescence in what is allotted us by him, double the pleasure of every enjoyment. The bosom of the contented christian is free from whatever would embitter it, and supplies additional sweets. It is evident that health, children, friends, reputation, or the conveniencies of life, must yield joys of a higher relish to him, who thankfully owns the goodness of God in granting them, regards them as instances of his loving kindness, given because upon the whole best for him, and as earnest of the more noble and consummate blessings of immortality; than he can receive from them, who ascribes them to a blind course of nature, and must therefore be without any sense of the divine goodness to mingle with them, and has no assurance of their continuance, and no expectation of better things hereafter. And then this easy resigned temper causes evils to be scarcely felt by us; for disposing us to regard them as under the direction of God, intended for our greatest good, and certainly terminating in it,

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they will give us no more uneasiness, than a disagreeable medicine would to a wise man, who knew it would certainly restore his health; or than a few days travel thro' bad roads, and bad weather, would give to one, who knew that it would bring him to an agreeable and abundant settlement for life. The main hurt adversity can do us, is to render us discontented; and when this is prevented, the remaining pain may be chearfully borne by a person animated with a sense of the divine complacency, and the near view of a blessed immortality.

Further; Contentment with our condition assists us in removing whatever is really prejudicial or inconvenient in it. The calmness, which is the result of this disposition, preserves our Reason clear and vigorous, qualified to discern the best measures for freeing ourselves from evil, or procuring good; and the whole man in the best posture vigorously to use them. Instead of lying down under the burden, and indulging to fretfulness and gloominess, which mend nothing, the contented christian sets himself to amend what can be amended, and then more easily bears what cannot be altered. And he is not alone in his endeavours to better his condition. It was proved just now, that God is peculiarly disposed to favour and assist him. And the sweetness and gentleness of his temper, together with his unshaken greatness of mind, incline
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all who know him to join their good offices, to cheer, relieve, or supply him. Whereas the person who abandons himself to peevish discontent, altho' he needs the help of others most, can least expect it; disobliging them by his ill-humour and fretfulness, and rendering himself contemptible by meanly sinking under those troubles, which a manly resolution would bear and surmount.

Again; nothing is more ornamental to our christian profession, and more recommending of it to others, than this excellent disposition. "A good man struggling with misfortunes, and rising above them, is, said *
"a heathen Philosopher, a spectacle worthy
"the attention of God:" and he certainly commands the veneration of men. To be grateful to God, and pleased with what he dispenses, while every thing around us is agreeable to sense and imagination, is no distinguishing attainment. But to smile where others would rage, to be thankful when others quarrel with heaven, and to enjoy ourselves in circumstances wherein others can hardly endure life, this manifests a noble strength of mind, a firm faith in God and in immortality, and the divine excellence of that religion, by the precepts, examples, and promises of which, we are raised to this heroic temper, and inabled to overcome the world; and will
dispose

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dispose those who wisely desire to be happy
 * to learn of Christ.

Finally; Contentment with our condition here is the best preparation for enjoying the perfect rest and blessedness of heaven, and a foretaste and assurance of it. If the *peace of God which passeth all understanding*, does now keep our hearts and minds thro' Jesus Christ, we are attempered to the happiness of heaven, and shall certainly possess it. God will give the best blessings to those, who are *thankful* for, and well improve, the lower enjoyments of this life. And if we *endure* when tried by afflictions, we shall be qualified to enter upon eternal rest, and receive as a reward of our patience, resignation, and continued chearful diligence in the service of God, amidst losses and afflictions, the crown of life and immortality. The chief satisfactions of the contented christian being drawn, not from sensual gratifications, or the vain show of life, all which must perish in death, but from gratitude and love to God, from a strong faith and pleasing apprehension of his unbounded wisdom and goodness, and an entire resignation to them; from the testimony of a good conscience, from a warm and active benevolence, and frequent serious regards to that state of exalted devotion, goodness, and felicity, for which he is designed; his soul is fitted

* Matt. xi. 29. * Phil. iv. 7. * Psal. l. 23.
 * James v. 1. 1 Pet. i. 7. 2 Thess. i. 4—10.

fitted to enjoy the bliss of heaven, whenever God shall call him up to it. Having with pleasure done the will of God, and received all his dispensations in this mixed state of things, he is qualified with a transport of delight to do the will of God as Angels do in heaven; his love to God and goodness being now made perfect, and to be compleatly blessed in what God shall there grant him: And God hath promised to those who resemble his beloved Son in Contentment and Refignation, and overcome the various evils and afflictions of life, that *they shall sit down with Jesus on his throne, as he also overcame and is set down with his Father on his throne.*

These are some of the good fruits of Contentment, a disposition in itself so excellent, which should strongly determine us to cultivate it by proper reflections. Let me now

II. Briefly represent the contrary evil nature, and mischievous effects of Discontent.

With regard to God, Discontent is in effect charging him as defective in wisdom, justice, or goodness; as not knowing, or not chusing to direct events in the best manner; and pretending, that we could order things better; or as not doing us justice, at least as treating us unkindly. And who dares look up to the infinitely wise, righteous, and good maker and governor of all, to whom this perversely complaining creature owes every thing, and maintain this charge? Yet how many in the

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secret language of their hearts every day renew it! But if every thing be disposed or over-ruled by God with infallible wisdom, and boundless benevolence, and for the best, why are you discontented? Why do you envy to others, what God sees fit to dispense to them? And why with secret murmurs refuse what he deals to you? Certainly the sinfulness of this temper is very great, and it is, as it ought to be, its own punishment.

It prevents our enjoying the good of the various gifts, in which a kind Providence indulges us. The heart that repines at wanting any thing which it passionately and unreasonably desires, overlooks all the blessings in its possession; or thro' the pain which discontent causes, is disabled for relishing them. Witness King * *Abab*, who soured by *Naboth's* refusal to sell him his vineyard, could not enjoy the pomp or pleasures of his court, but took to his bed, and sullenly refused his food; nor would be reconciled to it, till *Jezebel* by murder had put him into the possession of the vineyard, which he unreasonably coveted. Take also another striking instance. † *Haman*, who tho' the favourite of the greatest monarch, was by his pride made so discontented, because *Mordecai* would not stoop to him, when all the court besides, and all the empire, bowed before him; that he himself, after having reckoned up to his wife and his friends,

* 1 Kings xxi.

† Esther v. 13.

friends, the glory of his riches, the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the King had promoted him; and how he had advanced him above the Princes and servants of the King; yet declares, all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the King's gate. What glaring instances are these of the malignant influence which discontent has over all the blessings of life; and how strongly should they excite us to guard against any degrees of this temper. For while Contentment turns a desert into a paradise, this withers all the flowers, and blasts all the fruits of a paradise, and makes it comfortless as a desert. And it not only destroys the pleasure of every enjoyment, but it

Further doubles the smart of every evil; adding fretfulness of mind to pain of body, inward vexation to outward reproach, the loss of peace to the loss of friends, and internal pining and poverty to the loss or absence of external abundance. As a silly bird uneasy to be confined in a cage, by fluttering and striving to get out, only bruises itself against the sides of its prison, and adds pain and hurt to confinement, while another feeds and sings; so the discontented, indulging to sullen displeasure against God, peevishness and envy against men, and a gloomy sorrow of mind, because they cannot have every thing they wish, inflict on themselves evils of a severer smart, than the meer suffering the greatest afflic-

afflictions of life could produce in a resigned mind.

And then, which heightens the unreasonableness of it, it brings on itself all these evils to no purpose. A wise man would submit to present sufferings to prevent greater, or to procure more considerable goods; but he must be a fool who lashes and tortures himself to no good end; for discontent supplies no want, removes no evil, and amends no defect. With regard to God it must be wholly fruitless, who will not, in compliance with our perverse humours, alter the wise and good and well concerted schemes of his Providence. ^z *Who has hardened himself against him, and prospered?* We might as well hope, if our eyes were sore, to hinder by our murmurings the sun from rising, and paining us with his brightness. If we ^z *humbled ourselves under the mighty band of God*, accepted the correction of our faults and amended, this would probably incline a merciful God to remove his chastisements, and grant us blessings which we should then be prepared to receive with thankfulness. But sullenness, murmurs, and obstinacy, when we are under lighter corrections, will only bring upon us heavier; till a righteous God at last breaks in pieces the stubborn creature, that would not bend and submit to his will. And if we consider this temper with regard to men, our being fretful and peevish will not at

^z Job ix. 4.

^z 1 Pet. v. 6.

all dispose them in a friendly manner, to help and relieve us. On the contrary, the fallies of an angry and impatient spirit provoke harsh and unkind returns from them. And with regard to ourselves, discontent is also fruitless. That time and spirit and strength of mind are consumed in a sullen gloominess, or restless complainings, which if applied to mend our temper and condition would produce a great change for the better. And our reason is so clouded by repining and melancholy, that we can neither discern our real interest, and the best ways of throwing off the evils we groan under, and procuring the good we desire, nor pursue them with success.

Finally, by the torments of a discontented mind here, we prepare ourselves for the company and sufferings of wretched spirits in hell; since a great part of their miseries are caused by fruitless rage against God, whose appointments they cannot set aside, by galling struggles with chains which they can never break, and eager and impatient covetings of those good things, which they would not seek in a way of submission and obedience to God, and must utterly despair of gaining in a state of murmuring and rebellion.

To sum up in a few words this persuasive to cultivate a contented temper, and to suppress the first risings of the contrary. Contentment gives a little heaven upon earth, and

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qualifies

qualifies us to enjoy heaven and blessedness in perfection and forever. While discontent having punished us with a little hell here, drives us downward to the regions of fruitless rage, heart-burning murmurs, and black despair.

You are I presume by these considerations fully convinced of the excellency and happiness of a contented, resigned, and grateful temper, and fully resolved to cultivate it. You are then prepared to receive with attention, and follow with diligence, the directions proper to be observed, if you would acquire it; these therefore I shall recommend in the next Discourse, and conclude the subject.



SERMON

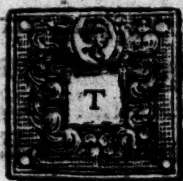


S E R M O N VI.

Directions for forming and improving
a contented Disposition.

PHILIP. iv. II.

*For I have learned in whatsoever state I am,
therewith to be content.*



O give assistance to those who are desirous of learning this divine art, in the preceding Discourses a general view was given of the nature of it; the principles on which it is founded, and the effects these are fitted to produce, were distinctly represented. Various reasons were mentioned, the frequent and serious consideration of which is very useful to strengthen this temper, and the chief motives urged, which should determine

us to give all diligence to improve ourselves in it. Our method now leads us

IV. To recommend such directions to be observed, as may facilitate our acquisition of this temper, and improvement in it. And besides making the principles and reasons of christian Contentment before offered, familiar to the mind by frequent and serious meditations upon them, I would advise the practice of the following rules, as of great efficacy to form and establish this amiable and happy disposition.

1. Let us make clear our interest in the divine favour, by prevailing habits of piety and goodness. You have seen that christian Contentment is mainly founded on the belief of God's infinitely wise and good Providence, and of our peculiar interest in it, so that all events shall certainly work for our good; and on the noble hope, that we are under the conduct of God advancing towards a state of compleat and everlasting felicity. And nothing but our becoming habitually and prevailingly virtuous and devout can give us such rational and lively hopes in God, and for eternity, as will enable us to be chearful and contented, whatever befalls us by the way. Besides, irregular and guilty passions are a continual disturbance to the bosom in which they rage, and will never suffer it to know a settled satisfaction. ^b *The wicked is like the troubled sea,*
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^b Isai. lviii. 20, 21.

when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace says my God to the wicked. In proportion also as pride, covetousness, anger, lust, or envy have any sway within, our peace of mind will be less.

Would we then be contented, let us be seriously and intirely devoted to God, and make it the great concern of life, to be approved by him, and happy forever. Let us make reserve of no sinful passion, but *deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts*, and thoroughly reform whatever under serious views of death and a future judgment gives us anxiety, and makes us to fear the condemnation of God. A partial and defective religion and obedience, will yield us at best but a broken and imperfect peace of mind. But when by an intire compliance with the demands of the christian covenant, we have made clear our title to its *exceeding great and precious promises*; when by daily love, gratitude, and devotedness to God; by an uniform integrity, goodness and mercifulness of disposition; by moderate affections to this world, and continual regards to immortality, we have *made our calling and election* to life eternal sure, and qualified our souls to enjoy the satisfactions diffused from a clear sense of the love of God, and bright prospects of a glorious and happy eternity; *the peace of God which passeth all understanding,*
will

will then constantly keep possession of our hearts *through Jesus Christ*.

2. If we would be contented in every state, let us accustom ourselves to eye and acknowledge the over-ruling direction of God in all events; and by humble and fervent prayer commend ourselves to his favourable guidance and bounty. Although God really directs all events, yet it will contribute little to the peace of our minds, unless we habituate ourselves to consider and trace his most wise and good Providence in all. As I observed in the beginning, this calmed the mind of *Job*, under unparalleled losses and afflictions, that he considered the fury of the elements and of wicked men, as under the direction of God; so that when the *Chaldeans* carried away his substance, and a storm of wind killed his children, he said, *the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord*. Does then a sickly constitution tempt us to discontent? Let us consider it as a necessary discipline appointed by God, who joined our souls and bodies, to teach us submission, resignation, disengagement from the world, and a heavenly temper, and to qualify us for the rewards of these dispositions in an everlasting state. We shall then be contented, and thankful, that *light afflictions which are but for a moment, will work out for us a far more exceeding, even an eternal weight of glory*.

Or

Or does the ^a prosperity of the wicked provoke us to murmur? Let us reflect, that they are raised by God as *Pharaoh* was, to answer great and good purposes; either to correct the sincerely but imperfectly religious, or to teach us that worldly prosperity is not the happiness of man, nor this world his home, and the like; and that when they have accomplished these ends, they will be cast into the fire, and punished according to their deserts. Our great Master assures us, that *not a sparrow falls to the ground without God*, and that *even the hairs of our head are numbered by him*. Let us steadfastly believe and frequently consider this, and what to us appears to be confusion, irregularity, and a subject for discontent, as proceeding only from men and from second causes, will appear to be all wise and good in the design of God, and in the final issue, and therefore to be willingly acquiesced in by us.

To cherish this persuasion by daily supplications to God, heartily commending ourselves to his peculiar guidance, will then be our wisdom, in a world wherein we see only second causes; and without thus daily refreshing our remembrance of him, should be prone to forget and disregard the first and chief. *Be careful for nothing*, says St. Paul just before the Text, *but in every thing by prayer, and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God*; and then the peace of

^a Psal. lxxiii.

^c Phil. iv. 6.

of God will prevail in your hearts. The commending with humility and resignation our afflictions to the divine compassion, and our wants to the divine bounty, is one condition of our receiving from God relief under the one, and a supply for the other; and prayer may thus produce Contentment, by procuring the removal of what tempted us to repine. Prayer also to God, that he would form in us this excellent disposition, is one condition of his succeeding our honest and constant endeavours to learn it.

And then, prayer by a natural efficacy relieves the mind, and disposes to Contentment. Have we not often found our sorrows lightened, when we have imparted them to a kind and faithful friend; what relief then must it give, to lay them before the mercy of God our heavenly Father, whose goodness and compassion are infinite as his wisdom and power? Certainly to consider our happiness as the care of this God, our wants as the charge of his bounty, and the direction of all events relating to us as his concern; to supplicate his favour, and resign all our interests to his disposal, with hopes allowed by him of his paternal care, and of soon arriving at the inheritance of his children in heaven; to exercise these pious affections every day in fervent prayer to God, will compose and cheer our minds, produce a firm trust in the divine goodness, make eternity continually present to
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our thoughts, and thus annihilating all the cares and joys of time, render us intirely satisfied with the favour of God and the hope of heaven.

3. In order to our being intirely satisfied with what God allots us, let our thoughts be more imployed on the blessings we enjoy, than on those we want, or on the afflictions we suffer; and let us look more to those who are below us in life, than to those who are above us. One of the antient Sages having lost an estate, when an acquaintance came to condole with him on the loss, reasonably and chearfully replied, "Friend, I think there is more reason for my condoling with you, for I have yet two farms left, while you have not one." Grief when it grows excessive fastens the attention intirely upon the loss or suffering which occasion it, causes us to pass over unobserved the various unmerited blessings of heaven, and then to become discontented. Whereas gratefully recollecting and owning the mercies of God, will make us ashamed of murmuring against a Father, who in kindness withholds something that would be hurtful; at the same time indulging us in various good things which we have forfeited, and who grants these as preparatory to the compleat happiness and everlasting riches of heaven.

And as we should often look on the bright side of our own condition, so upon the dark side of other mens; and more on those be-

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low than on those above us. It is frequently the false apprehension, that our troubles and wants are peculiar to us, that excites us to think we are hardly treated. Whereas to consider numbers as more afflicted and distressed than ourselves, and many of these living chearfully and thankfully notwithstanding it, will silence our complaints, compose us to Contentment, and inspire with gratitude. There is a great deal of good sense in the Proverb, "*a common calamity is a common comfort.*" "** When once a*
 " great King did excessively and obstinately
 " grieve for the death of a beloved Wife, a philosopher observing it told him, that he was
 " ready to comfort him by restoring her to
 " life; supposing only he would supply
 " what was needful. The King said, he was
 " ready to furnish him with any thing. The
 " philosopher answered, he was provided
 " with all things necessary excepting one.
 " He wanted the names of three persons, who
 " never mourned, in order to inscribe them
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 " find one such man. Why then replied the
 " Sage, are not you ashamed to mourn, as if
 " you alone had fallen into so grievous a case,
 " when you can not find one person in the
 " whole

** Julian, Ep. 38. cited by Dr. Barrow on Contentment, Sermon, 8.*

"whole world, that was ever free from like afflictions?" To consider only persons, who in many circumstances are advantageously distinguished from us, will incline us to envy and discontent; but to look upon the numbers below us in real satisfaction, and the most valuable advantages, and every truly pious person, be he as much afflicted as you will suppose, may yet, all things considered, be inform'd of multitudes in possession of fewer blessings than himself, will dispose us not only to submission, but gratitude to God, who hath so mercifully distinguished us.

4. Consider how few your natural and real wants are, and it will prepare you to be contented in every state. Food, raiment, and a warm and convenient habitation, are all the things without us that we really want, and that are necessary to a man's passing life comfortably. And there is no truly pious and good person, but by the blessing of God on his own care and industry, or from the friendship or charity of others, which his virtues will procure him, does usually enjoy these, and may depend upon them. And as for the better pleasures of piety and goodness, the joys of an approving conscience, and of heavenly hopes, God has put these into his own power, and by the help of God which is always ready, he may feast himself with these as often as he will. Think of this, and it will dispose you to Contentment, and

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make you ashamed to murmur against God, for not granting you what you do not really want. If plain and wholesome food will not suffice you, but you must have what is costly and luxurious; if clothes clean and whole will not please, unless they are rich and showy; or a neat and warm habitation will not content you, but you must dwell in one grand, spacious, and richly furnished; if leaving nature, you put yourselves under the guidance of fancy, and suffer it to create all these artificial wants, you will always be tormented with uneasy and ungratified desires, and never know satisfaction, as long as you saw or could think of any person, who lived more splendidly or luxuriously than you. And could you rise even to the greatness, treasures and luxury of the *Mogul*, you would still be short of Contentment. For why should you not desire the whole world, as well as a great part of it; a million of times more than you can use or enjoy, as well as a thousand times more.

Our ^f Lord promises, that the Providence of his heavenly Father should give to his faithful disciples food and raiment; and having these, saith St. *Paul*, *let us be with them Content*. But if we will not be contented with these while we are here, and with the hope of heaven and everlasting blessedness, when we shall have well performed the part which
God

^f 1 Matt. vi. 25.

1 Tim. vi. 8.

God has assigned us, we never shall be contented, nor ever deserve to be made happy. Judge therefore of what you want, according to nature, reason, and scripture; and not according to the demands of fancy, custom, pride, covetousness and exorbitant appetite; and limit your desires to what is natural and reasonable; and doing your duty you shall be supplied. **Trust in the Lord and do good, so shall you dwell in the land; and verily you shall be fed.*

5. If you would be contented in every state, avoid idleness, and be constantly well employed. Industry and well directed activity, besides supplying the conveniences of life, the want of which often causes discontent, give, which I principally design here, that health to the body, and vigor and chearfulness to the mind, which qualify us to relish with spirit the blessings of life, and to be thankful to the great author of all good. Whereas idleness is the parent and nurse of discontent. The body and mind being unemployed grow languid and restless, unreasonable desires, anxious fears, and splenetic humours possess the mind, and make it discontented; none of which can find room in the mind of him who is well employed.

It is the wise appointment of the author of our frame, and the natural reward annexed by him to diligence, and a right use of our powers

powers of body and mind, that these shall strengthen both, give soundness to the one and spirit to the other; as well as procure for us the good things of life, and please and satisfy upon reflection. While the contrary effects produced by idleness are the natural punishments of it. May you not observe numbers in lower life, who to their constant labour owe robust health, lively spirits, and a chearful enjoyment of natural blessings? While persons, whose plentiful fortunes exempt them from the necessity of thus employing themselves for a subsistence, and who have not the prudence and resolution to engage their natural activity in the pursuits of knowledge, and the practice of virtue and beneficence, languish in idleness, enjoy none of the blessings of life, and are over-run with spleen, sickness, and discontent. If you would then guard against discontent avoid idleness, and be always well employed. But if you would know Contentment in its most perfect degrees, and in the exercise of your active powers, enjoy the noblest satisfactions from yourselves,

6. Accustom yourselves much to the labours and pleasures of the mind, and to derive your satisfactions chiefly from improvements in knowledge, virtue, and piety. He prospers, whose soul prospers; and his soul will always prosper, who in earnest seeks it's prosperity. And he whose soul prospers, must

must enjoy a happiness as much above his, who derives it from the world, as a divine temper, and the foretastes and hopes of a divine and eternal felicity, excel any gratifications of the brutal part, or any entertainments of a vain imagination. Are you then at any time disposed to be uneasy? Think in what virtues you are yet deficient, and set yourselves to become proficient in them; think what is wanting in your capacity or furniture for the pleasures of devotion; and by new improvements and repeated exercises of it, endeavour to augment your capacity and relish for these pleasures, and your enjoyment of them. Or consider what advantages and opportunities you have in your hands for doing good, and improve them; and accustom yourselves to estimate your prosperity and happiness, by your success herein; do this frequently, and you may be always satisfied from yourselves.

For wherever you are, and in whatever circumstances, you may cultivate these dispositions, and practise these virtues, and find a good God always ready to assist, accept, and succeed you herein. Wherever you are therefore you may be blest with a strong sense of the divine approbation, a noble consciousness of advancing in his favour, and in true goodness, and with still brighter and more enlarged prospects of the never-ending blessedness of heaven. Yea, oftentimes the more you are
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by afflictions taken off from the world, the more abundantly you may possess these satisfactions. Apply therefore your main concern and strength of mind to these, and you will become contented and happy.

7. Would you attain Contentment in what soever state you are? Consider the examples of eminently pious and good persons, who amidst great afflictions have distinguished themselves by meekness, submission, gratitude, and a chearful resignation, and it will help to raise you to a like temper. The perfect pattern of the Son of God incarnate, I proposed to you before. But besides this ^h *we are compassed about with a glorious cloud of witnesses*, to the great efficacy of our religion for producing Contentment. Let us therefore lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth most easily beset us, and run with patience the race set before us. ⁱ *Brethren, you have heard of the patience of Job, and seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy.* When you are tempted to think your afflictions above measure, consider both how much your goodness and your greatest afflictions are inferior to his; and how much your advantages for becoming intirely resigned are above his, since ^k *life and immortality have been brought to light for you by the gospel*; and it will mightily dispose you to be humble, and chearfully submissive.

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^h Heb. xii. 1.

ⁱ James v. 10, 11.

^k 2 Tim. i. 10.

Consider also the Prophets of God, and the Apostles of our Lord, who were not more remarkable for piety, than for suffering affliction and for patience. Consider the most worthy persons, on account of piety, goodness, and usefulness, who have fallen within the compass of your knowledge, and who have been remarkably afflicted, either by sickness, by the loss or ill behaviour of friends and relations, by strait circumstances as to the world, or unkind treatment from it; and who have risen above all these by a noble serenity of mind, a grateful love and willing submission to their heavenly Father; and it will silence all murmurs as if you were hardly dealt with, and might claim a gentler treatment; will make you ashamed of sinking under lighter afflictions, than persons of like frailty and passions with you have overcome, and excite you chearfully to proceed and persevere in your christian course, under the care and guidance of the same heavenly Father, and in expectation of the same blessedness, to the possession of which they by faith and patience are arrived before you.

This minds me of the last direction.

8. Would you be contented in whatsoever state you are in this world? Let your thoughts be often and seriously fixed on the sure, compleat, and everlasting happiness of the next. Sickness, pain, want, folly, vice, reproach, ill treatment, treachery, violence and death

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are confined to the present scene. Immortal health and vigour of body and mind, perfection in knowledge, goodness, and divine love, and an intimacy and friendship with beings wholly of this character; the glorious presence and full approbation of the great God, the presence and smiles of the enthroned Redeemer, the brightest and largest views of the divine perfections and works, and corresponding sentiments of veneration, gratitude, love and devotion.—These conspire to make up the felicity reserved for the next, the everlasting state, where God ¹ *shall wipe all tears from our eyes; where they hunger no more, neither thirst any more; where there will be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, nor any more pain; and where of consequence, are fulness of joy and pleasures for ever more.*

Whatever our present condition is, we may act our part so as to make it subservient to the securing this divine blessedness. This is a most certain truth, confirmed by ^m *his promises* when near dying, and by the glorious resurrection of the Son of God, who stooped to be afflicted to suffer and to die, before he entered upon his reward. Let us think seriously on the greatness, perfection and everlasting duration of this blessedness, and then say, whether any labours or sufferings here can appear considerable, which must be gone through in the way leading to this happiness; whether

¹ Revel. xxi. 3. ^m John xiv. 1. Luke xxii. 28.—xxiii. 43, &c.

whether the hope of it be not fitted to inspire more noble and solid satisfactions, than the possession of the whole world can give; whether the God who by the discipline of the present state, is in the wisest and best manner preparing us for it be not infinitely good; and whether we have not then infinite reason to be thankful, and acquiesce in all his dispensations, and in whatsoever state we are to be content.

Let us make these thoughts and hopes habitual, and we shall be habitually contented. Let us, like our Apostle, *look not to the things that are seen which are temporal, but to the things which are not seen and are eternal*; and like him we shall *reckon all the sufferings of this present time, not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed*. We shall bear well the afflictions, and discharge chearfully the duties of life, ^a *rejoicing in hope of the glory of God*; and death whenever it comes will be welcomed, as what shall introduce us to that state, where every want will be supplied, every excellent desire exceeded; and where we shall find, that the afflictions and trials of the present time had a most direct tendency to prepare us for the rest, and glories, and felicities of eternity. May God bless what has been offered, and make it greatly instrumental to prepare us for this blessedness; and in the mean time for teach-

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^a Rom. v. 2.

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ing us Contentment in every condition. And let us seriously consider, and honestly pursue, these instructions and encouragements of his Gospel, and God will make us wise for present peace, and everlasting joy and salvation, Amen,



SERMON



S E R M O N VII.

The Reasonableness of Religion.

J O B xxi. 15.

What is the Almighty that we should serve him? And what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?

N these questions wicked men, insolent with their prosperity, are by *Job* represented expressing their contempt of religion, and insulting the religious, who put them in mind of their duty to God, and dependence upon him. Satisfactorily then to answer these questions is a matter of the greatest importance, for vindicating the honour of religion; and for giving to the pious a solid assurance, that they act rightly and reasonably in cultivating a religious temper, and that their ^a *labour in the Lord shall* not

^a 1 Cor. xv. 58,

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not be in vain. To return such an answer to these questions is therefore what I shall now attempt. And thanks be to God, that by the bright evidences of his Being and Perfections with which he hath filled the world, by the present good fruit naturally growing out of piety and obedience to him, and by the everlasting rewards which he hath prepared for the pious, and of which he hath given full assurance, he hath made it easy for us to satisfy such, as from a love of truth shall ask these questions, and to silence those who would insult us with them.

The first question relates to the reasonableness, the second to the advantages of religion. I would answer each distinctly, and confine myself at present to the first. *What is the Almighty that we should serve him?* What proofs are there of the real existence of him who is called Almighty?—Of what perfections is he possess'd to make it reasonable for us to reverence and obey him?—What has he done for us, to lay us under obligations to serve him, and give him a right to demand it?—And finally, what proofs are there, that he regards our conduct, and is at all concerned whether we serve him or not?—These queries include the full meaning of the first question in the Text, and a good answer to these will be a sufficient answer to it.

I. *What is the Almighty that we should serve him?* Is he a real Being whom men call Al-

Almighty; or a mere fiction of priests and politicians? Most certainly a real Being; and we have stronger assurance of his existence, than of the existence of any other Being besides ourselves. That we ourselves exist we cannot doubt, or that we are capable of thought, design, action and enjoyment, and that we very lately began to be. That we did not make ourselves is very clear. We must then have been before we were; and have acted when we confessedly were nothing, and could have no power. Besides, we are conscious we have no such power as giving existence to ourselves or others; and that we cannot continue our life or happiness, but are intirely dependent on the will of some other. That our earthly parents are not the authors of our Being is also most evident. They know not when nor how the bodies of their children are formed; and as to their souls, their nature, and wonderful faculties and their beginning to be, they know nothing. There must therefore exist some great invisible Being, the Parent of mankind, who continually forms and brings them into life; such constant effects produced throughout the world requiring a cause equal to them. And as no greater instance of power can be conceived than to cause that to exist which was not before, or to create, the *Father of our spirits* must be Almighty. And since no Being can give the perfections of

of intelligence, liberty, power, goodness, and the like, to others, if he have them not himself in the greatest degree, the common Father of mankind must be possess'd of the greatest understanding, wisdom, liberty, power, goodness, and the like valuable qualities. And as certainly as we ourselves are derived and dependent Beings, there must be an Almighty from whom we derive, and who created us.

You might as reasonably affirm, this house was built, yet there was no builder; this clock made, yet there was no maker; as that we ourselves now are, and but lately began to be, and yet there was no mighty and intelligent cause that made us. Thus easily is the first question answered, Is he whom men call Almighty a real Being? And we no sooner seriously consider ourselves, and the cause of our existence, than we discover him.

Further; we cannot doubt, whether a friend with whom we continually converse, and who does us a thousand good offices, really exists. That is, whether within the body there be an intelligent and benevolent cause which guides the motions and actions of the body. We know that the tongue cannot talk rationally, unless it was guided by a rational principle within; nor the hands perform continued offices of kindness, unless the principle that directed them was also benevolent. And we see that the body, when destitute of such a principle, or a soul to animate

animate and guide it, is void of life, motion, and power. Now for the same reason that we conclude without hesitation, there is a rational and benevolent principle within the body, which is the source and director of its several actions, we must conclude, that there is a most wise and powerful and good God present throughout the material world, actuating and guiding it. The sun a thoughtless mass of fire, the ocean a senseless heap of waters, this earth a dead unactive globe of matter, and all the parts which compose it, in themselves void of life, thought or motion, could no more move themselves in such a regular manner, and produce such innumerable varieties of skilful and beneficial effects, as day and night, summer and winter, and the inexhaustible plenty of trees, and fruits, and plants which cover the earth, and supply it's numberless inhabitants; than the tongue of a human body could give me wise counsel, undirected by a rational principle; or the feet run to my assistance in every danger, without a friendly mind to excite and direct their motions.

Again; the sameness of nature among mankind all over the earth, the manifest adjustment and correspondence of their various powers, inclinations, and passions to each other, and to the world which they inhabit, and the visible subordination of all the other animals to mankind; and the healthfulness, fertility,

tility, and usefulness of the material world to the common good of the various creatures, in subordination to mankind, and these effected by the same laws of motion every where uniformly observed, prove men to have all one common Father, who made also and furnished their habitation. And these innumerable effects constantly produced, bearing on them the most evident characters of an all comprehending wisdom, and a most extensive benevolence, prove their great author not only Almighty, but most wise and good. If a few actions of apparent thought, design and kindness, determine us beyond all doubt to believe and own a wise and good principle within the body of a man, we call our friend; innumerable effects continually produced in the world about us, and stamped with the most evident characters of the highest wisdom power and goodness, and by the instrumentality of causes, themselves void of all thought power and motion, must if we reason fairly and consistently determine us yet more firmly to believe, and more heartily own a most wise, powerful, and good mind, actuating the whole world; and who since he continually acts cannot but always be. And this has brought us to the

II. Question included in the first part of the Text, *What is the Almighty that we should serve him?* Of what perfections is he possessed, which should make it reasonable for us
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to reverence and obey him? To this we answer, every perfection which we find in ourselves, or can trace in the world, and in the greatest degree conceivable. Service when rendered to the Almighty, denotes the highest esteem and veneration of his excellencies, a strong concern to be approved by him, a chearful practice of whatever we judge well pleasing to him, and of consequence as serious a care to avoid whatever would displease him. The excellencies which render a Being worthy such regards from reasonable creatures are wisdom, power, goodness, and righteousness; and the Being in the sacred Scriptures called Almighty possesses these in the most exalted degrees.

It is natural and reasonable to desire to be approved, and to be willing to be guided, by persons of distinguished wisdom, who are good judges of what is excellent, and who know what is best to be done. And can we doubt whether that Being be most wise, who hath disposed the matter of the world into so grand, and beautiful, and useful a form; who is the author of the light and glory, and influences of the sun; who raised the hills, and spread the plains; who produces with infinite variety out of the same mass of earth, plants, flowers, fruits, grain, and trees; and who contrived and formed the numberless tribes of living creatures spread over the earth, gliding through the air, or inhabiting the waters,

each beautiful in its kind, and fitted to attain and enjoy its proper good? Can we doubt whether he knew what ends were worthiest to be chosen, and what means best adapted to effect them, who hath thus proposed and effected in so great a diversity of ways the best of ends, the good and well-being of an infinite variety of creatures? Must we not admire and adore the wisdom of the Almighty, who hath contrived and produced all this grandeur, beauty, and good? Must we not esteem it our highest honour, if we can act so as to become approved by him? And ignorant as we are in many cases, and liable to be deceived, must we not think it our happiness to be conducted by him in the paths which lead to true good, and the most lasting self enjoyment?

Further; that we did not give ourselves the intelligence and reason we are endowed with, but received them from the Almighty, was just proved, he then who hath formed us, capable of discerning and approving what is morally beautiful and good in actions, must not he be wise himself to discern it with the most perfect exactness? He who hath made us able to lay wise designs, and pursue them with prudence and success, must not he have a much larger fund of wisdom in himself? For as the pious *Psalmist* justly reasons, *he that formed the ear, shall not be*
hear?

† Psal. xciv. 9, 10.,

bear? He that formed the eye, shall not he see? And he that giveth man understanding, shall not he know? And if he thus wise to discern what is excellent, and worthy to be chosen and practised, and the contrary, is it not reasonable to desire his approbation in the practice of what is good, and to dread doing under his observation what he must condemn, what will make us appear foolish and guilty in his eye? Must it not also be reasonable, if he will condescend to direct us how we should act in life, to regard his instructions, and chearfully follow them, as the dictates of unerring wisdom?

Again; power especially under the guidance of infallible wisdom, is another perfection which commands our veneration of the possessor, and with reason makes us desirous of pleasing him, and fearful of offending him, since it promises all good and happiness to those who can engage it on their side, and threatens all evil to those who provoke it. If God then be indeed Almighty, what reasonable person but would serve him, and endeavour uniformly to practice what he recommends, and avoid what he forbids?

^d *We should walk before him, and study to be perfect.* And as our ^e Saviour directs, *fear him, who can not only kill the body, but destroy both body and soul in hell.* And certainly if any power is to be regarded it is his, who as he had

^d Genes. xvii. 1.

^e Luke xii. 4.

had power to create can also destroy; who having formed all the various capacities of happiness, and all the objects of enjoyment in the world, can make happy whom he chuses to make happy. Who as he *stretched out the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth,* guides the seasons, heaves the ocean, and rolls the tides, and raises and directs the stormy wind, can effectually secure every good to those who are under his protection, and with ease inflict every evil on those who by wickedness deserve punishment.

Again; what is amiable and venerable like goodness, or a steady and disinterested disposition to communicate good, and delight in it? Who but would cheerfully strive to please a Being, that delighted in making happy all qualified for happiness? Who but would with pleasure practice what is recommended to him by a Being, whose wisdom to discern what is best, and his kindness to prescribe it, are unquestionable? And who but would dread, by wicked and mischievous actions to displease that goodness, which delights to make all happy, and would especially make those happy, who comply with its benevolent designs? Who then that is reasonable will neglect to serve God, since he is not only Almighty, the greatest, but is also the best of Beings? Is our nature formed with kind affections which prompt us to desire

¹ Is. xl. 22. Ps. cii. 25. & cvii. 25.

fire and delight in the good of others, and do we naturally approve a disinterested benevolence, and must not the Being who made us capable of discerning it's beauty himself discern it? And must not he who gave us the kind affections so essential to the general good, be benevolent himself in a much greater degree, and after a more perfect manner? And the heavenly Father, as our divine ^s Master strongly reasons, far transcend in goodness *earthly parents*, to whom he hath given their kind affections? If to form one capacity of good and to fill it, be an indisputable instance of goodness, surely that Being must be infinitely good, who hath formed innumerable creatures with different capacities of good and enjoyment, and filled the world with suitable provision; and who continually ^h *opens his hand, and satisfies the desires of every living thing.*

Finally; if to power, wisdom, and goodness, we add righteousness, and these several excellencies are supposed to exist together in their highest degrees, we must surely judge it reasonable to pay the utmost veneration to the Being whose perfections they are, readily to practice what he commands, and with all our care to decline what he condemns; and all these perfections in a supream degree belong to Almighty God. His goodness is not a blind undistinguishing fondness, but the result

^s Matt. vii. 11.

^h Ps. cxlv. 9, 16.

sult of the most consummate wisdom, and determined by it. There is a difference as to good or ill desert in characters and actions, this he cannot but discern; approve what deserves approbation, and in proportion to its worth, and be displeased at the contrary in exact proportion to its ill desert; and behave accordingly towards the several agents, whose different characters are distinguished by the prevalence of amiable or base dispositions. And this is righteousness, to be affected and to act towards all as they deserve. Can we then imagine any Being so fit as God to give laws to all others, or so worthy to be revered and obeyed by them? He cannot err in giving laws, or in distributing proper rewards and punishments; having all power he may be depended upon to exert it in making happy the well-deserving, and punishing the wicked; and being supream in goodness, he will not fail of thus exerting his perfections, as this is evidently the best manner of exerting them, and most conducive to the good of the universe. But

III. Should it be granted that the Almighty is thus qualified to give laws and govern the world, yet what right has he thus to rule, to reward or punish us? And what has he done for us, which can oblige us to serve him, and render us guilty and deserving of punishment if we refuse it? What was advanced and proved in answer to the first question

tion will make it easy to return a satisfying answer to this. If the Almighty gave us our Being, and all our faculties of action and enjoyment, we are intirely his, and he may do what he will with his own. He hath an unquestionable right to direct how we shall exert the powers which he hath given us, and to punish us if we abuse them. Supposing then, that the God who hath given us our rational powers should require, that we often employ them in meditating on his perfections and works, acknowledging his daily benefits, and imitating him in the practice of righteousness and goodness, what are we that we should pretend to dispute his right to demand this from us, or to punish us if we refuse it?

Again; as he made us, ~~he maintains us in~~ life. The right order of our minds, and the health and vigor of our bodies are continually preserved by him, and every good thing we have is his gift. His sun enlightens and warms us, his air fans the vital spark within, his earth supports us, his animals and fruits feed and delight us; and we cannot name a good which we do not owe to him, as well as the power of enjoying it. If he therefore command us to exert the vigor of our bodies, and to use his bounties, within the limits of temperance, chastity and justice, what pretence have we to dispute these commands of the Almighty? Or how can we hope to be secure against his justice if we do? Certainly nothing can be more reasonable than that he

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should direct the application of his own gifts, and that we should believe he will punish an abuse of his blessings, to the injuring others, and corrupting ourselves, destroying the strength and purity of our minds, and the health of our bodies. And as we owe every thing to his bounty, should not gratitude make us studious of pleasing him, and dispose us to celebrate with warm affections his innumerable benefits, and to practise whatever may make his creatures happy; the most acceptable return to the supream goodness? Must not that mind be sunk into inexcusable stupidity and baseness, which does not see and feel the obligation to serve a constant, unwearied, and most generous benefactor?

If God had not created us, yet his supream perfection would have rendered it reasonable for us to be governed by his laws; and if we injured others, he would certainly have a right to vindicate the oppressed, and to punish the wrong doers, however his right to punish other faults might be disputed. But when we owe every thing to this Almighty Being, when the powers we misemploy, and the good things we abuse are intirely his, there is no room left to question his authority to give us laws, and to reward or punish us as we shall deserve. No room to insist in a way of contradiction on the question, *Who is the Almighty that we should serve him?* We may rather ask, where is the man that can seriously

ly doubt, whether he ought to reverence and obey his Almighty Creator, and continual Preserver, the giver of all his blessings, and the God ⁱ *in whose hand his breath is, and whose are all his ways?*

IV. Granting all this, the right of God to give us laws, our obligation if he did it to serve him, and the guilt and danger of refusing it, yet some will ask, what reason have you to think that God at all concerns himself whether we serve him or not, that he regards our actions, and is any more pleased or displeased with one way of acting than another?

That God is present with us, and knows after what manner we behave is most evident, from what has been already proved. He who continues the action and regularity of that nice engine the human body, and the reason of the human mind, must certainly know all the actions of the body, and thoughts of the mind. ^k *He is not far from any of us, in whom we live, and move, and have our being.* That Almighty Being whose hand unwearied rolls round the sun, and darts his beams, who raises the vapors, and sends them down again in fruitful showers, and who guides through the fine channels, which compose the bodies of plants and trees, the proper particles for the growth of all; he who thus constantly acts wisely and mightily all around us, must certainly know whatever is done under the sun.

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ⁱ Dan. v. 23.

^k Acts xvii. 27, 28.

But granting then that God knows all, what reason have we to think that he approves one disposition or one way of acting more than another, justice rather than injustice, or piety than profaneness? To this question also we have a good answer ready. If there be in reality an essential difference in dispositions and actions, and some are in themselves amiable and deserving approbation, and others evil and hateful, God who sees all things must see this difference, and in consequence be suitably disposed, and act suitably towards the several agents whose characters they constitute. And who that understands the terms can seriously doubt, whether there be a difference in worth and good desert, between humanity and cruelty, fidelity and treachery, gratitude and ingratitude, preserving the health of our bodies and the vigor of our minds by temperance, or destroying both by the contrary? I am persuaded there is not one who reads this, but sees and feels the difference; and though he may have acted wrong, seduced by partial views of pleasure or interest, you no sooner propose a case to him, wherein his interest or pleasure are not concerned, but he would immediately approve the grateful, the honest, and humane character and action, and condemn the contrary. If then the unprejudiced reason of every man sees this difference, a most wise God must certainly see it. And if he sees one
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sort of actions and characters to be amiable, and deserving favour and encouragement, and the other odious, and deserving punishment, he who hath no blind passion or partial interest to bias him, will certainly behave suitably towards persons of these different characters; make the one happy in proportion to their love and practice of what is morally good, and the other wretched in proportion to their general choice and practice of wickedness.

Further; as we are naturally formed to approve one sort of actions and to condemn another, and this judgment is the result of our reasonable nature, it is consequently the judgment of the author of our nature; and by forming us to approve righteousness, goodness, and mercy, he hath declared it to be his will that we should practise these; and by forming us to dislike and condemn the other, that it is his will that we should abstain from them. And the pleasing serenity and noble satisfactions which naturally arise in the mind from conscious goodness and integrity, are a reward which the author of the human frame hath immediately annexed to virtuous practice, and an assurance of his fully rewarding it. While that oppressing shame, that painful self-condemnation, and those restless suspicions and fears, which accompany and follow known injustice and wickedness, are punishments at present inflicted by the author
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of nature on the vicious ; standing declarations of his abhorring their conduct, and earnestness of his punishing them to the full of their deserts.

Finally ; the natural tendency of reverence, gratitude, and submission to God, of justice, fidelity, benevolence and compassion to men, and of chastity and temperance in regard to ourselves ; to promote private and publick good, and the numberless mischiefs caused to private persons and to society from irreligion and profaneness, from injustice, treachery, cruelty, lewdness and intemperance are manifest proofs that a wise and good God, the author of this constitution, approves one sort of characters and actions, and is displeased with the other. That God wills and delights in the general good of his creatures appears from the frame of the world, and the provision he hath therein made for it ; and from the tendency of the established laws of nature to this end. If then, as appears from his fixed course of acting, the good of his creatures be the design and delight of the Deity, it necessarily follows, that he delights in those persons and actions which contribute to the general good, and is displeased with those that disturb society, and ruin its happiness, the one forwarding his great design, the other opposing it. If the general observance of the laws of piety, righteousness, goodness, and temperance, be as subservient to

to the general good, as the execution of those natural laws according to which the sun rises and shines, vapors fall, and the tides roll, the God, whose goodness determines him constantly to execute these, must for the same reason will, that men whom he has made capable of a voluntary concurrence with him, should co-operate with him in promoting the universal good, by constantly observing the other; and favour or dislike them according as they do or do not conform to his design. And as distributing suitable rewards or punishments, thus encouraging that course of actions which promotes his great design, and restraining that which opposes it, is a necessary means to accomplish and secure the general good, God as a most wise and benevolent Being must be confest to approve and favour the pious, and righteous, and good, and disapprove the profane and wicked; and will certainly manifest in the properest way his love of the one and abhorrence of the other; and nothing can concern us in regard to duty, gratitude and interest like this, that we *serve the Almighty*. And in the words of the wisest of Kings we reasonably conclude, that ¹ *to fear God, and keep his commandments is the whole of man; the whole of his duty, wisdom, and happiness. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret*

¹ Eccles. xii. 13, 14.

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secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

Agreeably to this reasoning, in the revelation which God hath made of his will to mankind by his Son, and confirmed by very many great and incontestible miracles, he hath taught us, ^m *denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ. Who will render to all according to their works; unto them who by a patient continuance in well doing, have sought for glory, honour, and immortality, eternal life; but unto them who have not obeyed the truth, but obeyed unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that hath done evil; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord.*

This may be sufficient as an answer to the first question, *What is the Almighty that we should serve him?* and in proof of the reasonableness of religion. The answer to the other question will be given in the next Discourse, and we shall close this with two or three reflections.

I. From hence we may learn the usefulness of reason, and of serious consideration, to religion. The many evidences supplied by reason of the great principles of religion, which
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^m Titus ii. 12.—Rom. ii. 5.—2 Theff. i. 9

have been just set before you, are a sufficient proof, that Reason is not an enemy to religion, but the greatest friend; and that it is not because persons are guided by Reason, that they are irreligious, but because they are governed by sense, appetite, passion, and prejudice, and seldom apply their thoughts to religion, or ingage their Reason on this most important subject, and attend to what it dictates. Although the proofs of the being, perfections, and moral Providence of God, of an essential difference in human actions, and of a future state of recompences are so many, yet if we would apprehend them in their full evidence, frequent retirement, and serious consideration are necessary. While persons are ingaged in a hurry of business, or a round of sensual pleasure and amusement, these great truths affect them no more than a discourse on politics would a person, whose thoughts were taken up with a pleasurable assignation, and finding means to accomplish it. If we therefore would discern the great truths of religion in the brightness of their evidence, we must closely apply our Reason to these subjects, and meditate often and seriously upon them. Error, irreligion, and immorality proceed in a great part from thoughtlessness; and frequent serious consideration is the beginning of religious wisdom and happiness.

2. From the preceding Discourse may be inferred the absolute necessity of real religion

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and goodness, in order to our acceptance with God, and final felicity. These are not required of us by God out of mere pleasure, or laws which he can set aside or alter, but their acceptableness to God is founded in the unchangeable nature and relations of things. As long as God continues wise and good, he will approve this way of acting, and condemn the contrary. And as long as we are reasonable creatures, we must be made wretched by prevailing wickedness and impiety; or happy by virtue and religion. When a private family can flourish and be happy, by disrespect to the head of it, by mutual violence, quarrels, injustice and hatred, by lewdness and intemperance; and a wise and good parent approve these dispositions and practices in his children and servants, then, and not till then, may we reasonably suppose, that the most wise and good God, the common Father of mankind, will approve ingratitude and disobedience to himself, injustice and violence towards others, and an intemperate abuse of his bounties; and cease to delight in and make happy the pious, grateful, modest, benevolent, chaste, and temperate. It is not therefore a matter of indifference to us, whether in the present life we cultivate and establish a pious and virtuous temper, but as absolutely necessary to our acceptance with God, as it is certain that God is wise and good.

3. We may further learn from this Discourse the wisdom of daily devotion, prayer and praise. By these we chiefly keep present to our minds the great truths and objects of religion, the all-pervading presence, the supream perfections, and moral Providence of God, his unchangeable love of righteousness, and abhorrence of wickedness; and his certain purpose of gloriously rewarding the one, and fully punishing the other in the next state. That we have these truths clearly and habitually present to our minds, is necessary to our behaving well in a world of temptations; and that we behave well is necessary to our acceptance with God, and our everlasting felicity. Daily therefore to retire from the world, and by fixed meditation and warm devotion affect our minds with these great truths, is of the utmost importance to our arriving at a steady virtue, and enjoying in this life the pleasures of a good conscience, and a clear sense of the divine favour, and the never ending rewards of goodness in the next. It is therefore a reasonable and ^a *a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and sing praises to the most high; to recollect his loving kindness in the morning, and his faithfulness every night.*

4. From what has been offered we may also learn the great usefulness and virtue of the christian Revelation, which contains and establishes all those great and noble truths that

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^a Psal. xcii. 1, 2.

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Reason has proved, and hath inabled our Reason to prove them so clearly. Though these truths may be thus discovered and proved by Reason, yet the * greatest men destitute of our Revelation failed of discovering and proving them, in a clear full and satisfying manner, We are greatly obliged to the Gospel for giving us in an easy manner, and without any mixture of error, all the great principles and rules of religion and morality, which is a mighty help towards demonstrating their truth and excellence. And we are unspeakably indebted to the goodness of God, that when the light of Reason was in a great measure extinguished among the nations, by prevailing error and idolatry, ° and *the world with all it's wisdom knew not God*, he was then pleased by the Gospel to *turn men from darkness to light*, and guide them through the paths of a rational piety and solid virtue to true satisfaction here, and everlasting perfection and happiness in the life to come.

* See *Cicero* de Nat. Deorum. ° 1 Cor. i. 21. Acts xxvi. 18.

SERMON



S E R M O N V I I I .

The Advantages of Prayer.

J O B xxi. 15.

*What is the Almighty that we should serve him?
And what profit should we have if we pray
unto him?*



A V I N G, in answer to the first question of the Text, shown in the preceding Discourse the reasonableness of religion, I shall now in answer to the second show the advantages of it in one of the principal instances; or *what profit we shall have, if we pray unto the Almighty.* Prayer to God, which is one main part of a religious temper, and an excellent means of cherishing it, seems here, according to the common style of Scripture,

ture, to be put for the whole of religion peculiarly so called. It therefore includes here a strong and habitual sense of the presence, perfections, and providence of the Almighty, express and improved by a daily acknowledgment and adoration of his perfections, and study and celebration of his works; by constant grateful praises for his constant benefits, humble and earnest supplications of his favour guidance, and supplies; a chearful and prevailing concern to be approved of him in the practice of all goodness, and a filial dread of offending him by a wicked conduct; and a firm dependence on the wisdom and goodness of his government. for our enjoying all proper good here in a way of well doing; and for receiving in the next state his bountiful rewards of a virtue and piety cultivated and approved in the present.

Taking Prayer in this large signification for a religious temper, expressed and cherished by daily, humble, and grateful addresses to God, if it be asked, *what profit shall we have from it*,—we can answer, the advantages of of it are many and great, too many to be reckoned in this Discourse; yet it is hoped enough will be mentioned to prove, that it is as much our wisdom and happiness as our duty to be religious. Let the wise and considerate judge whether it be not by the following.

I. The

1. The pleasure and satisfaction immediately attending the several acts and instances of a devout temper, prove it to be profitable that we *pray to the Almighty*. If good and happiness be gain, what immediately gives these must be profitable. Pleasure arises from actions suited to the nature of the agent; in the preceding Discourse we proved religion to be reasonable, the best instances then of a reasonable temper must give the highest pleasure to a rational Being in his right state. And experience confirms what thus appears to be true in speculation.

The grandeur and beauty of objects and characters are the chief sources of the pleasure we receive in contemplating them. And what objects, or what character, can compare for grandeur and beauty with the perfections and works of the almighty, which employ the attention of the mind in Prayer? Fixedly to contemplate an alwise, almighty, and infinitely good Being, actuating an immense universe, and upholding and supplying numberless varieties of creatures; turning round the sun, darting its beams, and by them inlightning and warming attendant worlds; directing the moon in her nightly course, and all the starry hosts in their courses; heaving the ocean, raising from it fresh vapours, and sending them down again in fruitful showers; producing continually with infinite abundance and variety herbs and fruits, and with them
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covering the earth; and in successive generations introducing into existence innumerable living creatures to rejoice in his bounties; and amidst all this peculiarly attentive to the good of our numerous race, whom he waits to train to virtue and piety, and prepare for everlasting blessedness—To contemplate a wisdom unperplexed by the affairs of an universe, providing for every case, and ordering all with perfect ease for the best purposes; a power equal to the constantly actuating the boundless creation, and moving those unmeasurable globes that roll in it, and unfainting, though infinitely exerted, through countless ages; and especially meditate on a goodness equal to the communicating an infinity of good, inexhaustible by infinite supplies continually drawn from it, unalterable by numberless instances of folly and ingratitude, in the rational creatures of whom he condescends to take the care; and always disposed to make every creature happy, who is at all fit for happiness—To contemplate this greatest and best of Beings, his perfections and works, and the course of his Providence; and correspondently to venerate and love him, to feel his presence, and triumph in the thoughts of being always encompassed with almighty wisdom and goodness ever attentive to our welfare—Say, can there be pleasures equal to what arise from thus employing our thoughts and affections? Is not religion profitable which yields these pleasures? And do
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not the greatest things which engage the thoughts and wonder of the irreligious appear mean and childish, when set against these which Prayer daily presents to the mind of the truly devout?

Again; how great the pleasure of gratitude, which rises in proportion to the worth of the favours received, and the generous goodness of the benefactor! How noble then must be the pleasure of frequently, with a warmth of affection, acknowledging our obligations to the best of Beings! Who made us rational and immortal, that we might attain to an immortality of divine pleasures; who hath assigned us but a short time of trial, and made the condition of our final blessedness obedience to commands, which are essential to present self-enjoyment, and perfective of our nature. Who was so strongly set on the design of man's eternal blessedness, that the general corruption of the world only excited him to recover it, from the dominion of vice and of death, by the humiliation and death of his own Son. Who continually supports us in life, supplies our wants, and guards us from evil. And who, though constantly beholding our ingratitude and disobedience, bears long with us, pursues still his kind design of preparing us for eternal glory and felicity, and who is ever compassionate and ready to forgive. To think that the infinitely great God, ° *before whom*

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° If. xl. 15. 17.

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all nations are but as the dust of the ballance, yea, less than nothing, should be thus attentive to our happiness, what a flame of grateful love must it kindle ; and how noble the pleasure of indulging the pious affections of admiration, gratitude and devotion ! Hath he enjoyed pleasures worth naming, who hath been an utter stranger to pleasures of this kind ?

Further ; the meltings of a ^p *godly sorrow*, and an *ingenuous repentance* give inexpressible ease and satisfaction to the convinced and humbled offender. To feel the bad temper of our souls gone, that we are again affected as we ought to be towards the best of beings, and the best of parents, are strongly resolved on a right conduct for the future, and can think with some good degree of assurance, that God is reconciled to us, and forgives our folly and ingratitude, must yield satisfactions great as the preceding pains of conscious guilt, and fearful apprehensions of the righteous displeasure of God.

Finally ; to practise whatever is in itself good and amiable, animated with a view to the approbation of God, and by a desire of pleasing him ; to be conscious to an integrity and benevolence acceptable to God, and to be able with reason to think of ourselves as amiable in his sight ; and having made him returns which his unbounded benignity will
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most bountifully reward—Can the smiles of a king, or the flatteries of a court give equal satisfactions? I want room to do full justice to this argument. Yet what has been suggested is itself a sufficient proof, that it is profitable to pray to God, since we cannot be truly religious, but we shall immediately be thus happy.

Let me only add, that it is supposed in order to our enjoying these satisfactions, that we have worthy and amiable apprehensions of God, uncorrupted by a sour superstition; and that our hearts be clear from mean passions and engagements, since otherwise, these will hinder our attending to, and being suitably moved by the great and noble objects of religion.

2. There is profit to be found in praying to God, because Prayer by a natural influence calms our passions, and makes us considerate and wise. We more often err in the conduct of life, led aside by our passions, than through unavoidable ignorance, and the necessary obscurity of future events. Whatever therefore moderates our passions, and makes us cool and deliberate, must be greatly profitable. And this is done by Prayer, on which account the ¹*fear of God* is justly stiled, *the beginning of wisdom*. Have we not often experienced, that in the warmth of passion we have approved a particular pursuit as right and prudent, which,

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¹ Prov. i. 7.

when we have considered it as about to be examined by a wise and faithful friend, we ourselves have seen to be wrong? The barely thinking what he would judge in the case, hath shown us the faultiness of it. Thus the person accustomed to pray to a most righteous, good, and wise God, for direction and blessing in his affairs, will be led to think, are my designs and measures fit for such a Being to succeed? And this thought will go a great way to show him, whether they are right or wrong.

Such a one can scarcely err in life through a narrow selfishness, and sordid avarice, who is accustomed to pray to a God infinitely benevolent; whose happiness arises from his being infinitely communicative of good to his creatures; whom therefore if he would resemble in excellence and happiness, it must be, by having as few wants of his own as possible, and doing as much good to others. He cannot easily sacrifice the usefulness and happiness of life to the mere show of it, who is used to contemplate and address a God, whose excellence and happiness consist in wisdom, righteousness, and goodness. Nor can he readily sink into the indulgences of sense and appetite, into intemperance and debauchery, who frequently by Prayer converses with a most wise and good God; whose natural image he bears, and who made him to be happy in knowledge, goodness, integrity, friend-

friendship, and beneficence; who instead of designing he should die like the brutes, designed him for an immortality of rational pleasures with angels; such a one therefore cannot allow himself to live like a brute.

Further; whatever exercises the understanding, and the nobler powers and affections of the soul, by a natural influence improves them. We can not pray to any purpose but we must be considerate, use reflection, disengage ourselves from the hurry of sense and passion, and be affected with the great importance of wisdom, virtue, and goodness; must accustom ourselves to govern our appetites and passions, and not be governed by them. If we therefore pray often and seriously, we shall become wiser and more considerate, and acquire a greater command over ourselves. Are not the most who miscarry in life, ruined by a stupid or gay thoughtlessness, or by an headlong pursuit of the pleasures of the body? Must not Prayer therefore be greatly profitable, which accustoms us to sober thinking, and lessens our attachment to the meaner pleasures of sense, by giving us a taste of the noble satisfactions of truth, gratitude, goodness and integrity? Pleasures which never impair the constitution, stain the character, or hurt the fortune; but on the contrary have the best influence on all these. If we would therefore, especially at our setting out in life, escape being engaged beyond retreating in foolish, mean, and ruin-

ruinous pursuits, let us increase the strength of our Reason and of our noble affections, and their command over the meaner, by frequently employing them in fervent prayers and praises to the Almighty.

3. It is profitable to pray unto God, because Prayer by a natural influence establishes our integrity and virtue against temptations; thus makes us happy in ourselves, and gains us the esteem and confidence of others, which are of the utmost advantage in life.

As to ourselves, so much virtue is so much happiness. Temperance, chastity, well governed passions, integrity and benevolence naturally make us happy, as they preserve the health of the body, and are themselves the health of the soul; as they secure us the approbation of our own minds, a good hope of the divine favour, and the love of others, and inspire a strong confidence in God, and the most cheering hopes for futurity and eternity. And Prayer naturally increases virtue, as it keeps in continual view the almighty God, who is the supream patron of virtue, and the sure and infinite rewarder of it; besides procuring his help in the practice. We cannot pray seriously and constantly but we must grow better men; for we cannot think of God aright, and seriously regard him, but we must be animated to all goodness; and we cannot increase in goodness, but we must increase in happiness. One great part of Prayer is imploring

ring divine assistances, that we may acquire a steady command over our passions, and be formed to an active benevolence, and established virtue. The begging divine aids for these purposes will cherish in us a strong sense of the worth and importance of these dispositions, and their acceptableness to God, encourage us to strive for them, and determine us, as we would not trifle with God, to do what is in our power to attain what we desire him to grant as the greatest of favours. Earnest Prayer to God for others will as naturally cherish in our bosoms a warm benevolence; causing us constantly to regard the general good, as an event peculiarly pleasing to God, and exciting us to our utmost to promote that design, which we beseech the Almighty to succeed, and ourselves to do good to those, whom we intreat him to bless. This is the natural influence of Prayer to forward us in all virtuous practice, and every new degree of virtue is a higher degree of inward satisfaction and self-enjoyment.

Besides; it as naturally gains us the esteem and confidence of others. As we live in society our satisfaction and prosperity will be dependent on the regard and goodwill of the persons among whom we are conversant; and a great and established credit is so much certain power and wealth. Nothing renders persons esteemed and beloved like a command over their passions, a strict integrity, an open honesty,

honesty, a generous benevolence, and a tender compassion; and nothing like frequent and fervent Prayer to a most righteous and merciful God for exciting us to these virtues, and raising us above temptations. This must in part appear from what has been just offered, and a few reflections more will make it fully manifest.

Can we suppose that a person who in daily fervent Prayer acknowledges, and commends himself to the Providence and blessing of a governing God, who directs all events, delights in the good and upright, and promises to be *'a sun and a shield, to give grace and glory, and withhold no good thing from them;* that this person can see any great temptation, in an opportunity of making considerable gain by unrighteousness; who is assured of obtaining whatever is really good for him in a way of righteousness, and animated by a noble ambition to approve himself to a most righteous and ever present God; from whose view no secrecy can conceal, and for the loss of whose favour no wealth can recompence? The desire and hope of securing some good, or avoiding some evil, in a shorter and more effectual way, than that of plain honesty, are the usual temptations with men to step aside out of this path. They fancy they will just go a little out of the way to gain this advantage, and then return again; but they do not consider, that one act of falsehood and injustice

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often makes more necessary, either for concealing or supporting the first; till at length they are irrecoverably intangled in vice, and dishonesty becomes their settled character, and losing their credit, they lose the greatest external enjoyment, the being esteemed and beloved; and the most effectual means for raising their fortunes.

Again; besides a firm integrity, a tender compassionateness of heart, and a generous beneficence, render persons exceedingly esteemed and beloved; and over and above what was just mentioned of the efficacy of Prayer to increase these, it has a most favourable influence upon them, by engaging us frequently to contemplate, love and celebrate the most bountiful, compassionate, and beneficent of all Beings; and this forms us to a resemblance of those excellencies, which we admire and love. It raises us also above the vain fear of wanting ourselves, what we charitably give away, and being losers by a generous beneficence; as it assures us of the special favour and supplies of the great Governor of the world, who will delight in and make happy his children, that resemble him in goodness.

If therefore it be profitable, not only to enjoy uninterruptedly the pleasures of a good conscience, but to be generally beloved, esteemed, and confided in; and an uncorrupted integrity and an extensive beneficence are the best means to make us so; then it is profitable

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ble to *pray unto the Almighty*, which will naturally cherish these good dispositions.

4. It is *profitable to pray to the Almighty*, because it will produce a noble joy and confidence in him, and a permanent chearfulness and tranquility, amidst all the uncertainty of events. When we call any thing profitable, we mean, that it either gives happiness immediately, or the means of procuring it; Prayer therefore must be allowed very profitable, which infuses into the soul an exalted joy and lasting satisfaction. To consider the government of the world as administered by a God of boundless power, all comprehensive wisdom, and inexhaustible goodness; and all causes and events in his hands, who will *make all things to work together for good* to the pious and holy, the righteous and merciful; who will give them every real good, and turn aside from them every real evil, and direct their paths to the most solid self-enjoyment here, and to the highest felicities of an everlasting state—To commend ourselves in daily fervent Prayer to this almighty friend, and to be fully assured that we are his care; who will guide us by his counsel, shield us by his power, and supply us from his treasures, until he bring us to his eternal kingdom and glory; what noble joy, what serene and lasting tranquility must this produce in the human heart, amidst all the wants, uncertainties and

[Rom. viii. 28.—Prov. iii. 4.—Ps. xxxvii. 1.

and evils of life ! The favour, the treasures, the power, and promise of a king are compared to this a trifling security for the present life. Princes may fail, or change, or die. The most valuable goods are not in their power to give, such as true wisdom, the command over our passions, and the joys of an increasing virtue. There are also very great evils which their influence cannot remove, unruly passions, conscious guilt and baseness, deserved infamy, sickness, pain, and the dread of death. Whereas almighty God, who hath promised the good man his favour, and whose perfections he contemplates, and whose promises he pleads in Prayer, can rectify every disorder of body and mind, and supply every real good to both. His wisdom cannot mistake what is best for us, nor his power be overruled, nor his goodness and faithfulness fail.

What joy then can compare with his, who daily considers himself as the charge of this God, and exults in the assurances of his protection, conduct, and bounty, while he shall be continued here, and of being soon raised by him to the fulness of joy ? Nay, the distress, uncertainty, and wretchedness which prevail among those who are without hope in God, make him enjoy the more his own security under the divine favour. Like him who safe on shore, can fearless see the tempest rise, and hear it roar ; and when he beholds others tossed and shipwrecked, more sensibly feels his

own happiness in being secured from their sufferings and dangers.

In all the mentioned instances of the profit we may have from Prayer, I have confined myself to the natural influence of it on our minds, and to present experience; and all who will try may themselves know the truth of the assertion, and the advantage of the practice. This I have done, because the persons who asked the question, must be supposed to pay little regard to the promises of Revelation. But besides these sensible and experienced advantages,

5. If we can trust to the clearest dictates of Reason, or to the most express promises of Revelation, a religious temper and conduct, will certainly procure for us peculiar guidance, assistances, and supplies from an ever present God, though we cannot always distinctly know and assign them.

Reason assures us with the fullest evidence, that a most wise, righteous, good, all-powerful, and omnipresent God, the governor of the world, must approve and delight in the humble, grateful, righteous and good, who acknowledge his providence and government, and study to please him. If God approve and delight in himself on account of his moral perfections, he will consequently be pleased with his reasonable creatures, in proportion as they resemble him in these; and by proper dispensations to them, encourage that temper

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temper and practice, which hath the kindest influence on these qualities; and as he hath all events in his discretion, and all good in his gift, will order all for the best to them who trust in the Lord and do good.

And Revelation authorizes and establishes these conclusions of Reason. *"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.* Thus Solomon advises, to whom God in answer to his Prayer granted wisdom superior to that of any mere men. And a greater than he, the Son of God, who came from God into the world, assures us in his name, that if *"we pray in secret, our Father who seeth in secret will reward us openly. And if earthly parents being evil yet give good gifts to their children, much more will our heavenly Father give good things, especially his holy Spirit, to them that ask him. Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find; and pray, give us this day our daily bread, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.* Which instructions and promises abundantly confirm the extensive directions and encouragements of his inspired Apostle. *"Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by Prayer, and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.* And promises like this supported the faith and piety of good men

9. *Prov. iii. 4.—2 Chron. i. 7. Matt. vi. 6.—Luke xi. 9. Phil. iv. 6.*

men before Christ. * *He shall call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honour him; to which might be added several before cited. It is therefore good for us to draw nigh unto God, who will guide us by his counsel, and afterward receive us unto glory; whereas they that are far from him shall perish.*

The ways in which God may really, though secretly, fulfil these promises are many. For instance, by influencing the minds of the truly devout to take prudent and successful measures, and exciting and encouraging them to pursuits really good; or else turning them aside from such as would prove hurtful and ruinous——By favourably disposing the minds of others towards them, presenting to their minds their good qualities in the most advantageous light, or softning their displeasure, and the like. God who is intimately present with all human minds, and regulates the rise and continuance of our ideas and thoughts, may very often really, though to us imperceptibly, do this. If upon our humble Prayer in sickness, the mind of the Physician be directed to a successful prescription, the reward to Prayer is as real, as if we were cured by a miracle. If in reward to a pious temper and life, the minds of the rich are inclined to supply us in distress, the profit of Prayer is as real, as if like *Elijah* we were fed by a miracle. And if a pious person

* Ps. xci. 15, lxxiii. 24.

person be secretly diverted from making a voyage which would have proved fatal to him, the profit of Prayer is as real, as if he had been permitted to set out to sea, and then like *Jonah* been saved by a miracle,

As it is most agreeable to the wise and uniform conduct of divine Providence, not to interpose sensibly and miraculously, but in such secret way to influence the human heart; and as the ways of doing this are many more than we can assign, we may certainly conclude Prayer to be greatly profitable, when both Reason and Revelation promise such peculiar favour, guidance, supplies, and protection from a governing God, to those who pray to him, and regularly trust in him. The scripture history furnishes various instances of this kind interposition, and teaches us to trace the benefit to the real author, in the cases of *Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Christ* and his *Apostles*. And the experience, and observation of the pious and considerate, will furnish them with many more, wherein the kind direction of Providence has been evident to themselves, though not so clear to others; and wherein they have been able to say with a rational assurance—"This blessing I
" owed to the peculiar favour of God—and
" this deliverance was a sensible reward to
" Prayer and a pious trust." But I must leave these hints to be pursued in your own meditations, and hasten to a close.

6. Prayer to the Almighty is profitable, because it is the best relief under all distresses, and especially when death approaches. What ease and comfort have we found, by disburthening our sorrows into the bosom of a wise and cordial friend; what an unspeakably greater relief must it yield, to pour them out before an infinitely wise and good Father, whose bounty and compassion are the greatest conceivable, and his power equal to his goodness? The pious soul no longer feels the weight of its cares and troubles, when it has thus *cast them upon the Lord*. Sickness, losses, and disappointments, are no longer felt as evils, when considered as really directed by the supreme wisdom and goodness for our greatest good; and when we have earnestly prayed to that God, who hath promised to comfort and support us, and to deliver us in the best time. To be subject to pain, sickness, and sorrows of various kinds, is the condition of all; to secure therefore by Prayer these divine consolations, is the wisdom of all.

And then nothing is more certain, forget it as we may, than that we must all soon die; and that wealth, friends, pleasures, and natural fortitude, all fail us at death. The irreligious, who have lived without God in the world, with reason tremble at the thoughts of entering his immediate presence, and appearing before him as their judge. Having
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past their lives estranged from the satisfactions of goodness and devotion, and wholly possess'd by worldly cares and sensual pleasures, they have no taste or disposition for a spiritual and divine happiness, and no hope of enjoying it; but unable to delight themselves any longer here, are forced into another state, under an absolute despair of being happy therein. Conscious to no concern for pleasing God in life, but to numberless instances of ingratitude and disobedience, they stand shuddering and full of horror on the brink of eternity, yet must plunge into it, and with apprehensions of sinking into miseries great as their past guilt and ingratitude.

Whereas the good man, who hath ² *prayed without ceasing, and in every thing given thanks*, and been thus enabled to maintain warm, through out life, a concern to please God, and to keep himself in his love; having been well accustomed to the pleasures of devotion, of contemplating the perfections, and works, and word of God, to the pleasures of gratitude and hope in him, and a sense of his approbation; and knowing these to be the most valuable satisfactions that a reasonable Being can enjoy, and that they are possess'd in the highest degree in heaven, it is no grief to him to quit the mean pleasures of the body, when he quits with it all its evils and imper-
Y fections.

² 1 Thess. v. 17, 18.—Jude xxi. * Luke xvi. 22.

fections. He can chearfully follow his ^a *guardian Angel* into the world of spirits, being no stranger to their employments and pleasures; and exulting in the hope of soon ^b *seeing face to face* that God, whom now he sees but *darkly* through the veil of flesh, and that ^c *Jesus whom having not seen he loves*; and of being beyond all doubt assured of their approbation, the hope of whose favour now so much transports him; and of knowing, loving, praising and adoring them in perfection, from whom he hath received such divine consolations in his imperfect devotions here. ^d *Commending therefore his spirit into the hands of his heavenly Father*, Prayer, which hath so greatly contributed to prepare his soul for heaven, transports him to the joys of the divine presence, and the bliss of immortality. For

7. As Prayer suits the soul to the blessedness expected after death, and thus by the divine promise gives us a title to possess it, it is *infinitely profitable to pray to the Almighty*. Reason convinces us, that the soul which hath of choice lived always estranged from God, and *said to the Almighty, depart from me*, and is thus grown absolutely unfit for the joys of his presence, must forever want them. And it also convinces us, that the person, who when tried, whether amidst the pleasures and

^a Luke xvi. 22. ^b 1 Cor. xiii. 12. ^c Phil. i. 23. ^d 1 Pet. i. 8. ^e Luke xxiii. 46. Acts vii. 53.

and cares, and distractions of the world, he would cultivate the love of God, a concern to please and resemble him in goodness, and a disposition for the pleasures of the clearest knowledge of God, the most exalted adoration and love, and perfect virtue; hath cultivated these dispositions, thus approved his love to God, and grown meet for the happiness of heaven, shall certainly enjoy it. The unbounded goodness of God determining him to make happy all his creatures, who are fit for happiness and comply with his design.

And these dictates of Reason, Revelation abundantly confirms, assures happiness, everlasting happiness, *to the pure in heart, to those that love God, draw nigh to him, and delight in him.* This blessedness which Revelation promises after death, and for which Prayer thus prepares us, being compleat, divine and eternal, the profit we have by praying to the Almighty appears to be infinite. And biding those who scoffing ask, *what profit shall we have if we pray to God?* consider the full import of divine and everlasting blessedness, and look into the next world, and think what angels there enjoy forever—what is the bliss of perfect minds, and immortal bodies, of perfection in knowledge, devotion, goodness, and friendship, and of possessing

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every

* Matt. v. 8. 1 Cor. ii. 7. Pf. lxxiii. 24. John xiv. 1.
1 Ep. iii. 2. 1 Pet. i. 3.

every satisfaction proper to a reasonable and immortal Being—We can with triumph tell them, **THIS** is the **PROFIT** they have, who *pray to God*; for the repeated and express promises of this we praise him now, and in hope of the full accomplishment *will call upon him as long as we live.*

To persuade all to do this, is the only Application that I shall make of this subject. If such be the profit, and these the rewards of Prayer, let us begin and close every day with secret fervent devotion. Let us delight to retreat from the world, and to converse with God on the Lord's day. Let us often meditate on his works, and on his word. Let us enrich the relish of the good things of life by a sense of his goodness in them, and by the hope of far better blessings to eternity. Let us raise the conduct of life by a constant regard to his approbation; and secure solid supports under all the evils of it, and divine aids for the practice of our various duties, by humble and fervent addresses to the Father of mercies. And if we would succeed, let us remember, that formal and spiritless petitions and praises will not procure these blessings. Unless our understandings, our hearts, and affections are exercised in our devotions, we cannot expect the natural fruits and advantages of having our souls thus employed. Nor will a bare bodily service without the heart

heart be accepted, or rewarded by our heavenly Father.

We must therefore resolve to disengage ourselves from all criminal pursuits, and from all mean passions and attachments, that we may have a capacity for the pleasures of devotion, enjoy them in some good degree here, and be prepared to enjoy them in perfection forever. We must resolve, that our general conduct shall correspond with our Prayers; and that we will not by a wicked and unrighteous behaviour affront that most holy and good Being, whose favour we seek by Prayer. In short, to become thoroughly religious must be the business and delight of life; not merely a task to which we submit, that we may avoid hell, and take shelter in heaven. Love, gratitude, dependence, hope in God, and a concern to please him, must animate our Prayers, and thence diffuse themselves through our whole temper and conduct. Then shall we know in a lower degree here the pleasure and the profit of Prayer; and at that hastening hour, when all the hopes of the irreligious and all the profits of sin shall cease forever, we shall experience it to have been a most wise and reasonable part, that we have *served the Almighty*; and infinitely profitable that we have *prayed unto him*; being as happy as almighty power in conjunction with equal wif-

wisdom and goodness can render those whom God delights to make happy.

May be blest what has been offered, to determine us all without delay to seek this inestimable felicity, and make it our own. Amen.

